Amongst the living, there existeth no sign of any such greatness. Every succeeding generation it seemeth to increase, whilst such examples as had undisputed supremacy before it made itself manifest, have since wrapped their antique cloaks about them, and been content with humbler places. The shades of Sophocles, Æschylus, Euripides, Menander, and Aristophanes, are stirred from their long deep lethargy by wondrous memorials of the wool-stapler's son of Stratford uttered within the ruin which was once their "Globe," by some adventurous tourist from an island that never had name or existence in their memories: and so their masters in arms yet pupils in learning the haughty Romans, rise from their desolate theatres marvelling exceedingly to hear there proclaimed in all that appertaineth to excellence in the writing of Tragedy and Comedy the undisputable omnipotence of a Briton.

Thus, in his national proper apparelling goeth he so famously abroad, but in a foreign dress he is scarce less reverenced, for the principal nations of Europe have strove to make his excellence as familiar with them as was possible, and have turned his English into as eloquent language of their own as they had at their commandment. By these means, the Spaniard, the Italian, the Frenchman, and the German, have got him into their friendly acquaintance. But of these only the Germans can be said either to know him thoroughly, or appreciate him with a proper affection. These excellent worthy persons do love him with all their hearts—study him so intently, they will not let the slightest of his manifold graces to escape without the full measure of admiration it meriteth and do so much make of him the general talk, as though all Germany were but Stratford-upon-Avon, and her sole glory no other than William Shakspeare. I have ventured to style him the High Priest of Nature, and truly, not without proper warrant. He is the chief interpreter of her mysteries, and the sovereign pontiff of her universal church, wherever the beautiful is felt, or the intellectual understood; and Nature, who gave unto him his surpassing attributes, receiveth back, in a myriad of exhaustless channels, as I have insufficiently noted, the divine excellence that came of her giving. Since he hath ministered at her altar there hath been no schism as to her doctrine, nor sign of dispute of her authority; for he so put her religion into language and action, that wherever there is enlightened humanity, there must ever remain the most earnest loving deep-hearted devotedness. In this capacity, it is as utter foolishness to attempt drawing up an inventory of the riches hoarded in the treasuries of the deep, as to seek to particularise, with any thing nigh upon faithfulness, the prodigal amount of good he hath caused to be distributed to mankind. As a benefactor, 'tis vain to look for his peer—as a philanthropist, no one hath lived with such profit to his fellows. The legacy which he left in trust to Time for the universal benefit, hath this peculiar property, that the more of it is disposed of, the more abundantly will it increase, and so rapidly doth it multiply itself as it getteth to be spread abroad, that it may, without any colour of exaggeration, be said, it is a benefaction that must embrace all space and all eternity.

Whilst endeavouring to exhibit something that approaches to the true character of the man, I have also sought to pourtray the principal characteristics of the age on which he conferred such marvellous honour. Perchance some may think that these volumes are worthy only of that sort of credit a mere romance can look for; but let them be assured there is more of history in these pages than divers books purporting to be histories can boast of, and whenever they hold not Truth by the hand they tread as nigh upon her heels as may be. Mayhap too, others may look on divers passages as savouring in no slight prominence of over boldness in the writer, but, in very truth, it is nought else but the daring which love inspires, and ought, it is respectfully urged, in no case to be considered as coming of any other source. Of the imperfectness of the elaborate picture I have essayed, I am as conscious as any person that breathes, but I doubt not amongst all liberal kind hearts I shall find such charitable constructions put on my deficiency, as may induce them to allow that the performance, humble as it may be, hath not been altogether unprofitable. This I have been the more induced to look for from the generous encouragement afforded to "Shakspeare and his Friends" by such critics and scholarly persons who have taken it in hand, who both publicly and privately have bestowed on it their commendation with such exceeding bounteousness as I had not dared to expect. That the praise so generally given applied much more to the subject than its treatment I cannot help but believe; but let that be as it may, I will ever seek what means I have at my disposal, to prove how earnestly I strive for the desert in which it ought to have originated.

Doubtless, it would be but fitting of me here, to make some apology for publishing these works out of their proper order, as the present should have preceded its predecessor; but methinks I cannot do better than leave the fault to be dealt with by the reader as he shall think fittest—hoping it may not be found a matter of such heinousness as to deprive the offender of some excusing, particularly as each is a distinct work, complete in itself. If there exist no other objection, I doubt not, despite their irregular starting, they will now run their race together as fairly and as gallantly withal, as can be expected of them.

There hath been some stir lately made concerning of the orthography of the ever-honoured name of our "Sweet Swan of Avon." On that point it is only necessary here to say that it was customary with divers notable persons of the age of Elizabeth, to write their names in more than one form, just as it took their fantasy, proof of which will be discovered in the letters of the time, wherein Raleigh sometimes signeth himself "Rawley." Lord Burleigh hath some three or four ways of spelling his name, and others do the like sort of thing; therefore, to find a variation in the autographs of the illustrious Shakspeare is in no manner strange. The orthography here adhered to, hath the recommendation of being that which the great Bard employed in the latter period of his life, when it is supposed he must have settled it to his liking; is moreover the same that was used by the choicest of his friends, who doubtless, had the best means of knowing his humour in it, and hath been made familiar to us, in consequence of its adoption by the most learned of his editors, critics, and scholars in this, and in all other countries, who, so it is presumed, ought to be the properest guides to follow in such a matter.

Here beginneth the Story of

THE YOUTH OF SHAKSPEARE.

CHAPTER I.

All was this Land ful filled of Faerie,
The Elf-Quene with hire jolie company
Daunsed full oft in many a grene mede,—
This was the old opinion as I rede.

CHAUCER.

The vallies rang with their delicious strains,
And pleasure revelled on those happy plains.

CHALKHILL.

What if my lordinge doo chaunce for to miss me,
The worst that can happen his cudgell will kiss me.

TRAGICALL COMEDYE OF APIUS AND VIRGINIA.

OH! what a beauteous night was that time honoured, twenty-third of April, in the year of our Lord one thousand five hundred and sixty-four! The air was clear as any chrystal, and the wind just shaking the fragrance from the young blossoms, as it swept along to make music in the fresh leaves of the tall trees, did create such harmony and sweetness therein, that nothing could have appeared so delectable, save the star-bestudded sky above, wherein the lady moon was seen to glide with so silvery a brightness, that the sapphire heavens, the flowery earth, and the sparkling water, were apparelled in one mantle of the delicatest light. Peradventure so fair a night hath never been seen before or since; yet, of such bountiful beauty as it was throughout, there was one spot wherein its exquisite rare attractions were heaped together with so prodigal a hand, that the place, for the exceeding pleasantness of its aspect, must have been like unto that famous garden of Paradise, that held our first parents in their primitive innocency and happiness.

It was a low meadow field, marked by sundry declivities and inequalities, whereon a goodly shew of all manner of spring flowers were sleeping in the moonlight, even to the very waves of that right famous river the Avon, which was flowing along in all its refreshing loveliness, at its margin. Trees were here and there of divers kinds, garmented in their newest livery of green—a row of alders—a clump of beeches—a solitary oak—a shady coppice were stretching far and wide in one direction; and hedges of hawthorn and elder, interspersed with crab, wild-plum, and towering elms, would intersect the country in others. Close at hand was the town of Stratford, with the tall spire of the church, and the quaint eaves of the houses distinctly visible. Here stood the mansion of one of its persons of worship. There the more modest dwelling of an industrious yeoman. At one place was the cottage of the sturdy labourer; in another the tenement of the honest miller, whilst, as the eye stretched out to the distance, other buildings might be faintly seen, which doubtless marked the situations of the neighbouring villages.

But, although signs of habitation were thus plentiful, of man or woman not one was there in sight; for this especial reason, all manner of honest folk had laid them down to sleep long since. Little could be seen of live things, excepting perchance a water-rat swimming upon the Avon, or, mayhap, a fold of sheep on the adjoining farm; or heard, save the tinkle of the sheep bells, or the bark of the shepherd's dog, occasionally responded to by some dog afar off; or the rushing of the water at the mill wheel, or the croaking of the frogs among the rushes, or the hooting of an owl as she passed by, intent on a mousing expedition to the nearest barn; and these sounds made as excellent sweet music as ever poet did delight to hear. Certes this was just such a scene, and these the very properest accompaniments for awakening in the heart that profound sympathy with nature which the few, to whom such feeling is familiar, give expression to, in sentiments that partake of the same beauty and immortality as the source whence they spring. All at once a new and unfamiliar sound came floating upon the air. It was faint and indistinct—a mere murmur, yet musically soft and low. Gradually it grew upon the ear, as a blossom opening to the sunshine. A gentle harmony became distinguishable: then came tones of such exquisite melodiousness, it was ravishing to listen to them. At last voices, seeming in some number, were readily heard, and then, words becoming audible, they were at last distinctly repeated in the following order:—

"We come from the violet's azure cells,
We come from the cowslip's golden bells,
From the hawthorn's odorous bloom we fly—
    From the dewy eaves
    Of the primrose leaves,
From the daisy's blushing buds we hie;
And fill the air with sounds and sights
  As though to earth all Heaven was streaming,
More sweet than lovers' stolen delights,
  More bright than aught loved maid is dreaming.
We come from the snowdrop's pallid head,
We come from the heather's lowly bed,
From the wild-bee's haunt and the wood-lark's home;
    From the grassy couch
    Where the lev'rets crouch,
And the coney hides:—we come! we come!"

Whilst this roundelay was being sung there appeared moving in the atmosphere, all manner of bright colours, like unto a goodly rainbow in the heavens, or a shower of all the delicatest flowers upon the earth, and presently forms could be distinctly traced amongst them; and as they approached the banks of the river, it was seen that they were crowds of tiny beings, of shape as beautiful as ever the eye looked on; garmented very daintily in what seemed to be blossoms of divers kinds and colours. Their complexions were marvellous fair; their hair of a bright golden hue, curling very prettily, decorated with exceeding small wreaths, or, mayhap, a dainty sweet flower worn as a helmet: and they floated on the air with infinite ease in every possible position; some plunging head downwards, and others, as it were, reclining backwards, looking to observe who came after them. On they came, as countless as the stars; and in the centre was one, round whom the rest were thronging with a wonderful shew of love and reverence; and she reclined in a car, carved of pearl, that seemed to be as light as a gossamer, was shaped like a shell, and drawn by two bright winged butterflies. Her face was as lovely as the morning light, and on her brows she wore a coronal of jasmine studded with fresh dew drops. A scarf of rose colour of a singular fine fabric, the material whereof had doubtless been stolen from the silk worm's web, was tied from the shoulder to the hip, where it was fastened in a bow over a close vest of a sapphire hue, richly ornamented with gold leaves; and the rest of her apparelling was of the like pretty fantasy. Scarcely had this exquisite fair creature and her companions alighted on the enamelled banks of the river, and the voices had become hushed into an indistinct murmur of pleasure at finding of themselves at their journey's end, when the air was again filled with the same wondrous harmonies and delicate words, that had there been created so recently; but the voices now were of a deeper tone.

Presently there appeared hovering about, a vast crowd of similar little beings as those that had a moment since alighted on the ground, only these were of a more masculine aspect, and garmented in hose and doublet, fitting tight to the body, of divers delicate colours, wearing famous pretty feathers in their caps, mayhap filched from the small birds; and some had quivers of arrows at their backs. Some wore a smart rapier of at least the length of a tailor's needle; and many carried spears of a marvellous fine point and thinness. These were floating on the air in all manner of picturesque attitudes, save one who sat in a fair car of gold, drawn by a pair of gigantic dragon-flies, attended by a company who appeared to act as a guard of honour. He wore a crown on his head, and a rapier at his side, and a purple robe of fine velvet, richly embroidered with stars, over his vest. Perpetual youth sat smiling on his countenance, and his limbs were of so graceful a shape, my poor words have not the cunning to describe it. As this assembly descended to join the other, a chorus of mutual congratulation arose, whereof the burthen of the sylphs was, "Hail Oberon!" and that of the others, "Hail Titania!"—shewing that those two were the king and queen of fairie—which seemed to be sung with such wonderful joy and so sweet a spirit, that it was exquisite to hear beyond all conceiving.

King Oberon having stepped from his car, advanced to that of his queen close by, and with a very excellent courtesy, did hand the fair Titania out, perchance to tread a measure on the verdant mead; whereupon their discourse ran thus:—

"Light of my life, and life of all my joy!"

rapturously exclaimed the fairy king.

"In whose fair eyes, the fountains of my bliss—
My soul drinks sweeter and more delicate draughts
Than flowers or fruits provide; say with what aim—
For well I know some hidden purpose lies
Within the covert of thy fantasy,
Have I been summoned with my company
From the deep dingle in the emera'd wood,
Where—'mid the tangled roots and gnarled boughs
Of reverential oaks and hoary pines—
With our rude mirth we rouse the dappled deer
Or chase the owlets to their dark retreats."

"And what wouldst give to know?"

asked Titania, with a pretty seriousness.

"What give, sweetheart?" replied he.
"How like a very woman art thou grown!
Thou hast some pretty meaning in the act,
Some quaint device—mayhap some harmless jest,
Whereby the rosy hollows of thy cheek
Shall be arrayed with all thy fairest smiles,
To bear glad witness how man's wiser mind
Can by a woman's wit be set at nought.
And for the secret thou'lt a bargain make—
Which having ratified, the secret's told;
And in its nothingness must lie the jest,
And its point thy triumph."

"Tush, my lord!"

cried his fair companion, half turning from him.

"Art thou so little curious as this?
Nay, by the trembling beam that leaves the skies
To steal soft kisses from the yielding wave,
I'll hie me hence and tell thee not at all."

"In pity say not so!" said he.

"I'll say and do!"

answered the other with a famous shew of resolution.

"Seem'st thou not more inclined to learn the drift
Of why on such a night of all the year,
I bade thee hasten to this favoured spot."

"Then am I curious to such excess," observed her lord.
"As passeth all conceiving. I prythee say
What was thy purpose. Tell it straight,
For my impatience is so powerful
As will endure no hindrance."

"O' my word!" cried Titania
"Thy nature grows impatient of a sudden.
Fie on thee, my lord! Dost mock me so!
With such conceits dost think a woman caught
Who for a curious humour hath been famed,

And therefore knoweth how it shews itself ?
Hadst *thou* a secret I would never rest
A minute, nay, a moment of the hour,
Till I became its mistress. I would watch
All fittest opportunities to ply
The searchingest questions ever spoke ;
And at thy rising and thy lying down,
The hunt, the walk, the banquet or the dance ;
In brief—in ev'ry time and ev'ry place,
I'd importune thee with such earnestness—
And in a way so lovingly withal,
Thou couldst not hold it from me if thou wouldst ;
Or shouldst thou still attempt to keep it hid,
Then would I venture close to where it hides,
And with sweet force dislodge it from thy lips."

" Then thus such sweet enforcement I employ."

Thereupon his elfin majesty very gallantly did salute his lovely queen, the which she received as if in no way inclined to anger, as may be supposed; and then they, saying manifold loving pleasantries unto each other, walked to where there was a banquetting table, set out for them with all manner of tempting delicates, and sat themselves down, each in a sort of throne: for the reader must be made aware, that whilst the king and queen of Fairie were conversing as hath been described, there were raised upon the green sward by their attendants, a royal canopy of crimson silk and gold, and a goodly display of most delectable cheer; and hundreds of the little people were running about putting the things in order—whilst groups of beautiful sylphs were receiving notable sweet courtesies from their elfin gallants; some reclining their graceful figures on the delicate grass, and others standing up as if preparing for the dance;—and in another place, there were seen a score or so of musicians a tuning of their records, theorbos, citterns, harps, sackbuts, and the like choice instruments. Presently, the queen gave the sign for them to begin their revels, and then the music struck up a most ravishing minstrelsy; the dancers commenced treading a measure with such infinite grace as hath never been visible to mortal eyes, and the rest were disporting of themselves in every part of the meadow, laughing, jesting, feasting, and making merry with such a prodigality of happiness as dull mortality hath no knowledge of. Some were a hunting of the field-mice into their holes, or driving the leaping frogs into the river, with a famous hallooing and admirable cheerful noise; others of the merry elves were amusing of themselves by jumping over the toadstools that grew thereabouts, and mayhap one, not being so good a leaper as his fellows, would jump clean into one of these dry fungous plants, to the near smothering of himself in its dust, and choking of his companions with laughter. Then some of the sylphs, who were not of the dancers, were engaged in making wreaths of the delicatest blossoms in season, either for those they affected of the other sex, or for their own wear. Others were putting together a true-love posie. Here and there might be seen a couple, apart from the rest, by the exquisite earnestness of their countenances, declaring themselves to be em-played in such delectable manner as showed there was no lack of affectionateness betwixt them; and a company of others had got in the midst of them an elf of a most jocund spirit, known to divers by the several names of Puck, Robin Goodfellow, and Will-o'-the-Wisp, who, as was evident from their faces, with his droll jests and diverting tricks, kept them in a constant humour of laughing. Here would be one mischievous elf running after a sylph with a huge worm, which it was manifest she liked not the look of; and there, another, pelting a companion with cowslips, who was making ready to fling at him with a like missile. Every where there was the appearance of the very absolutest freeheartedness; not a grave face was to be seen—not a sigh was to be heard. In the meanwhile, Oberon and Titania resumed their discourse after the following fashion:

"Despite the rating I have had, sweet life!" exclaimed he,
"Thy secret purpose still remains untold."

"Now art thou getting curious in good truth!"

she answered with a smile.

"Yet 'twould methinks be fitting punishment
To keep thee ignorant still, and hold thee so;
And now and then by deep mysterious hints,
Ambiguous phrases, and quaint fashioned words,
To fix thy patience on the tenter hooks;
And then to laugh at thy incuriousness."

"I prythee use me not so cruelly," cried Oberon.

"Dost feel a wish to learn this thing of me?"

asked his fair queen earnestly.

"By thy most precious love I do!" he replied.

"And *now*, what wouldst thou give to know?"

exclaimed she with great emphasis.

"I'll give thee aught
That lieth in the compass of my power."

replied he, with as much earnestness in his looks as in his words

"I'll bid the yellow goblins of the earth
To pile thee heaps of treasure—from the deep
I'll call the fairest mermaid of the wave
To fish thee up the rarest pearl that lies
Hid in its secret caves. Say but the word,
I'll fetch thee breezes from the spicy south,
Bearing within their overladen laps
The aromatic breath and odours rare
Of balmy blossoms and delicious gums—
Or from the ever glowing orient
Where the warm sky, like an enamoured maid,
Of her too loving nature half ashamed,
Looks on the earth with a perpetual blush,
All manner of such choice and tempting cates
As liberal nature there delights to shew—
Long ere the circling hours their task have done—
In bounteous banquet will I here array."

"All goodly gifts indeed!" observed the fairy queen.

"I'll hunt the air
To rob its tenants of their courtliest plumes,
And far and wide the forest chambers range
To carry off their richest furniture;
I'll"—

"Nay, I am content!"

said she, interrupting of his speech.

"I'll not exhaust
So prodigal a spirit. Now attend,
And if thy curiousness be truly great,
Thy ears must needs be rav'nously intent
Upon devouring up my ev'ry word."

This led to the appearance of increased curiousness on the part of her lord, which Titania dallied with so artfully, that Oberon broke out into exceeding impatience, whereupon she exclaimed as if in huge astonishment:

"Forsooth, and is it so! Alack, my lord,
I marvel at a sight so new and strange!
Man can be curious then? How wonderful!
It hath been said that womankind alone
Were moved by curiousness, whilst man too proud,
Too great,—too good to have such poor defects,
Lived in incurious ease his nobler life.
Why, what a change is here! Well, I have done—
My object gained, I'll now my thoughts unfold."

"Ah, prythee do!" said Oberon. Then continued she—

"Thou know'st with what great love
I do regard the children of this isle—
How long and deeply I have longed to find
Some gentle nature fed by glorious thoughts,
In whose delighting spirit I could breathe
The love of all things excellent and true,
That he might be found worthy of our care
Whilst we in him took profitable heed.
Thou knowest with what earnestness of heart
I've sought for one so lovingly disposed,
And found him not—thou knowest too
Of all the sweetest spots in this fair land,
This town of merry Stratford, and the stream
That glides in graceful beauty at its side,
I most affect—for honest simple souls
There crowd the chimney nook, and listen long
With firm belief and pleasure undisguised,
To frequent tales of fairy worthiness,
Till bedtime come; and then hie they to bed
And dream of music, flowers, and lovely shapes,
And innocent revelry and decent mirth,
'Till Chanticleer's shrill clarion wake them up
In cheerful labour to wear out the day."

"Ay!" exclaimed her lord, smiling.

"And if Puck but chance to have been there,
Doubt not this trust of theirs in our good help
Make sport for him and some mischance for them.
Mayhap some starveling burgess through the night
In dreams shall feast on princely delicates,

And wake without a crust to break his fast;
Or that some pedlar's wife both poor and proud,
For hours shall play the lady bountiful,
Till from the rushes she is forced to rise
To mend the patch-work of her husband's slops."

"Talk not to me of Puck, the graceless elf!" cried Titania.

"He shall be whipped with nettles if he dare
Intrude his tricksy spirit 'neath their roofs;
But hear me out. There dwells in yonder town
A modest wife with all kind feelings blessed,
Rich in a woman's riches—virtuous thoughts;
Gentle and generous, simple, fond, and true,
Careful of house, and of a famous thrift;
And she a mother is about to be.
This child unborn I know will prove a boy,
Under mine own eyes shall this boy be reared,
I will his disposition mould and shape
And make his nature shew the fairest signs
That ever blessed a mortal. Of his mind
I'll form a storehouse of the noblest thoughts—
The lore of Nature's many-leafed works
He there shall garner liberally and well,
Until it holds the library complete;
And in his heart a treasury I'll rear
Of sweet affections, honourable desires,
Fond aspirations, feelings high and proud,
And sympathies for all things beautiful;
Then by the hand this gentle boy I'll lead
Into the lovely places of the earth,
And shew him all the delicatest sights—
The field, the forest, valley, stream, and hill,
The exquisite sweet blossoms newly blown,
And the fair sky that spans and shines o'er all;
The whilst within his ravished ears shall glide
An everlasting concert of delight
From the soft breeze, the rustling trees, the wave
That makes its path in music—from the herd,
The flock, the hive, and all the feathered quires
That thrill the air with melodies divine;
Unto the merry cricket's silvery chirp,
Or shrill sweet pipe of cheerful grasshopper."

"Methinks that boy must lead a pleasant life,"

observed her lord.

"He shall find pleasure seek it where he will," she replied.

"For in his eyes shall dwell a power to see,
And in his breast an impulse to enjoy
The pleasantest things that nature doth possess:
And every pleasure shall a lesson bring,
And every lesson be with pleasure learned.
The loving hopes that grace humanity—
The fears, the cares, the passions, and the joys,
That wrestle with its spirit—the deep throes
Ambition dies with, and the gnashing pain
With which revenge is born—the mighty stilts
Whereon pride mounts its glaring littleness—
The mean resorts where cunning loves to hide—
The selfish wants that avarice keeps and kills,
And the great gluttony that eats itself,
Shall in his vision prominently live.

But with the knowledge of the human world
To him shall come a learning more refined,
Drawn from a brighter, better, wiser source
The gems that stud the canopy of night
When Time proclaims the burial of the day,
And those of daintier sort, though lowlier born,
That give the air its life, and earth its grace,
Shall fill his soul with meanings quaint and new—
From the deep shadows of the reverend woods,
And noon-tide sunshine in its golden streams,
He shall bring marvels: in the quiet light
Of the fair moon and her fair company,
A throng of starry thoughts that never set—
Under the shelving banks of the tall hedge,
And by the margin of the pebbly brook,
And 'mid the mosses of the abbey wall,
And round about the antiquated trunks
Of forest giants bare of leaf and branch,
He shall discover sage authorities
Oft to be quoted at a future day.
And wheresoe'er he ventureth himself,
Whether along the open fields he strays
When blooming beauty woos him as he walks,
Or through the tangled copse he makes a path,
Where songs of welcome burst from every tree,
Or by the Avon's winding bed he roams,
That offers to his eyes the glittering shower
With which this yielding Danae is won,
A thousand servitors shall round him throng
With loving guidance keeping him from harm;
Sport in the beam that seeks to dim his gaze,
Bend the low twig and catch the falling branch
That bars his way or topples on his head:
And where his look, in marvellous wonder falls,
Hold up the fairest blossoms to its view,
And shew him where earth's choicest sights lie hid."

"But for what purport are these things to be?"

asked Oberon.

"That with a nature so divinely reared,"

replied his admirable companion.

"And with a knowledge so profoundly gained,
He to the people of this favoured isle
Shall present pleasure bounteously afford,
And be a glory in all after times."

"A purport worthy of the Fairy Queen!"

exclaimed her lord.

"And I, that boy from manhood's sterner days,
Will take in charge, that no ungracious deeds
May mar the beauty of his after life.
But struggles must he have, and griefs, and pains,
And disappointments terrible to bear;
And then prosperity and friends and fame,
And honours that true greatness loves to see,
Shall try the temper of his metal well,
And prove to all his quality and worth."

Now was there seen amongst them such abundance of pleasant pastime, as was quite a marvel to behold, in which the tricksy Will-o-the-Wisp, or Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, as he was variously called, did appear to enjoy himself to the very bent of his humour. In the meanwhile, Titania and Oberon, having sufficiently discoursed of their intentions regarding the boy mentioned by them, moved from the banquet, and were soon pleasantly engaged treading of a measure to the delicatest music ever known. All of a sudden as they were disporting of themselves, every one of them very merrily, there came one hastening from the other end of the meadow, crying out something, the which as soon as it was heard, banquet, canopy, dancers, musicians, and all the fairy world disappeared in the twinkling of an eye; and of that gallant company no vestige now remained. The blades of the young grass, unharmed by the light footfalls of the tiny dancers, bent to the midnight wind. The frogs came peeping from the rushes, and the timid water-rat ventured to put her head out of the covered hole beneath the river's bank, wherein she had made her home.

"It be woundy cold o' nights, still dame, for all it be getting so nigh unto the flowery month of May," exclaimed an awkward varlet, looking to be something betwixt man and boy, and dressed in a humble suit of russet, famously worn and soiled, that fitted him not at all, as, carrying of a huge lanthorn with outstretched arm before him, he seemed to be guiding of a short stout woman, well wrapped up in a serviceable cloak and muffler, who bent her steps through the field towards the neighbouring town.

"Ay, it be cold enough, out of all doubt," replied his companion, in a quick thick voice, half swallowed in her muffler, as she endeavoured to keep as near as possible to his heels. "Yet do I remember me a colder night than this, two years ago this very day."

"Odd zooks! was it so indeed?" asked the other in a tone of monstrous wondering.

"Ay, that was it, Humphrey," replied the woman with impressive earnestness. "That night I had laid me down to rest my weary bones, and nigh unto midnight I had got me into the comfortablest slumber, weary body ever had, when there came at the gate so huge a noise, I had like to have been frightened out of my sleep and my wits too. I dressed me in a presently, wondering who could be a sending at that time, not expecting to hear from Mistress Hathaway, for a month to come, nor from Dame Hart, for a full week; when, looking out from the lattice I spied a horseman, in a cloak that swept down close upon his horse's heels, who, in a terrible high voice, bade me come quick, for life and death depended on my speed. Thereupon, as may be supposed of me, I made all convenient haste in my apparelling,—for thou knowest, Humphrey, I like to keep none waiting."

"O my life, Gammer Lambswool," exclaimed the other drily, "kept you not me an hour by the clock, ere I got sight of you, I know not what waiting means."

"Nay, nay—thou couldst not have been at the gate so long as that," replied the old woman; "for ere thou hadst well knocked twice, I called to thee from the lattice."

"So God me save," cried out Humphrey, with wonderful emphasis, "I knocked some score of times—to say nought of the monstrous bawling I kept up, loud enough to wake the seven sleepers; and I doubt not at all, master will give me a taste of the cudgel for having tarried so long."

"He shall do thee no such unkind office, be assured," said Gammer Lambswool, "for I will take care to bear thee blameless in the matter. But to return to what I was a saying," added she, too glad at having a listener to let him off without the whole story. "On coming to the gate, the stranger was for having me mount upon a pillion behind him, which I liked not at first; but upon his pressing the emergency of the case, and placing a gold piece in my hand, I made no more to do—for I like not appearing over scrupulous in matters of jeopardy, the more especially when an honest wage is to be gained by it. I had scarce got my seat when the stranger said he must needs blindfold me, the which I liked less than the other; but upon his assuring me I should suffer no harm, and placing another gold piece in my hand, I suffered it to be done, for thinks I, mayhap the occasion requireth secresy; and I oft had a huge suspicion there was no necessity for me to seem to know more than those who required my aid, would allow; if so be they paid me well for holding of my curiousness."

"Here be a villainous thick cloud about to cover up the moon, and be hanged to it!" exclaimed her companion in a tone of vexation, as, with a face waxing marvellously fearful, he watched the approach of a broad black cloud spreading over the sky. "Make more speed, I pray you, good Gammer, else shall we be left in the dark before we have got out of this field, which hath the horridest reputation of any place in these parts; and I like not passing through it at this late hour, I promise you."

"In honest truth it be not in good repute," observed the old woman, quickening her pace somewhat. "Unnatural strange sights have been seen here, and it be well known that they by whom they have been looked on, have never been themselves since. But to my story. Hardly had be blindfolded me, when he spurred his horse to so monstrous a pace, that it seemed more like unto flying than riding; and, not having been used to such, perchance I should soon have been jolted from my seat, had not I held my companion round the girdle as firm as a vice. Now began I to repent of my too great willingness to venture on this errand. I was going I knew not where, with I knew not whom, to do I knew not what; but when I bethought me of the stranger's largess, I took heart, for out of all doubt a piece of gold is a notable fine recommendation in a new acquaintance; and methinks it be ungrateful to think ill of those who have behaved handsomely to you; so I said nought, and proceeded on my journey with as much contentation as I might."

"A grace of God, Gammer, make more speed!" cried her companion earnestly.

"I be getting on as fast as my old legs can carry me," answered she; and then continued her gossip. "Well, we travelled on at this terrible pace for I know not how long a time, till the horse came to a dead stop; and, with an injunction to be silent, my companion quickly alighted, carried me some little distance in his arms, led me up some steps, and then leading me yet a little further, suddenly pulled the bandage off my eyes. I found myself in a very stately chamber, having the most costly hangings eye ever beheld, and every thing of a like splendour about it. Lights were burning on a table close upon the bed's foot, but I had not time to notice one half of what was there, when my conductor haughtily bade me look to my patient, as he pointed to the bed; and hearing a most piteous groan, I hastened to do his bidding."

"Mercy, good Gammer, make more speed! These clouds be close upon the moon, and we not half through this terrible field yet;" cried Humphrey, evidently more attentive to the look of the sky than the speech of his companion.

"Marry, 'tis so sure enough!" exclaimed the old dame, taking a hasty glance at the moon. "Well, there found I a dainty young creature assuredly in as doleful a strait as poor lady ever was; and I came in the very nick of time, to do her such desirable service as she required of me. I sought to give her what comfort I could, but I was stopped by the voice of him who had brought me, angrily bidding me hold my prate, and speed my office; and then broke he out into such bitter invectives against the poor lady, as were dreadful to hear, to the which she replied never a word, for indeed she could not, she was in such severe travail. At last, to my great joy, the lady became a mother; but scarce had I took the babe in my arms, when my gentleman, who had been all this time striding across the room, seemingly in a horrible bad humour, hearing the child cry, darted towards me, snatched it rudely away, and hurried out of the room with it. I felt at that moment as if 'twould be an easy matter to knock me down with a feather. I could have no doubt there was a most cruel mischief a-doing, and my blood run cold within me, at the thought of it."

"There! the moon hath gone clean out of sight!" exclaimed Humphrey, as if in utter despair. "Alack, what an unchristian place for an honest poor body to be in at this late hour."

"Well, we must e'en get on as well as we can, and the lanthorn will help us to make sure we go not astray," observed the other, consolingly.

"What to do I knew not," continued she. "The poor mother looked to be scarce alive, that was pitiful enough to see, let her fault have been what it might; but taking away the life of an innocent babe that had scarce began to breathe, could not be ought else than a very devilish and unnatural murder."

"Nay, talk not of murder, I pray you, good Gammer!" cried her companion very movingly; "I cannot see the length of my arm, and I know not what monstrous fearful things may be in the darkness, ready to pounce out upon us."

"Nothing unnatural can hurt you if you be not evil inclined, let them here lie ever so thick," observed the old dame; but this seemed not to add much to the other's small stock of courage, for he continued to walk along, looking suspiciously about him in as perfect a fear as ever was, whilst Gammer Lambswool strove to keep as close at his heels as she could.

"Ere I could recover myself from the strange fright, what had been that moment done, had put me in, he returned, and without the child," added she, with much emphasis. "Whereupon I was so confounded and terrified at the sight of him, that I remember not what further took place, till I found myself at mine own door with a full purse in my hand; but less glad at the sight of it than I was to be quit of the villain's company."

"Mercy, Gammer, what be that?" cried Humphrey, in a monstrous fearful voice, as he lifted up his lanthorn, evidently a trembling from head to foot, and seemed to be gazing at something in the distance.

"Where, I pray you!" inquired the other, eagerly, as she strove to raise herself on her toes for to peep over his shoulder.

"It moves!" whispered her companion, drawing his breath hard.

"Heaven save us from all harm!" muttered the old woman, beginning to partake of the other's alarm, though she knew not as yet what it was caused by.

"By St. Nicholas, it be making towards us!" added he, as plainly as his fright would allow, and the next moment the lanthorn dropped from his trembling hands, and he fell on his knees, saying of his prayers, with his teeth a chattering as if he was taken with an ague. Gammer Lambswool, being in the dark—for their light had been extinguished by the fall—and hearing something approaching, was about to take to her prayers also, when she was startled by a quick succession of blows, that seemed to fall upon her companion with a force that quickly put all conceit of a ghost out of her head.

"Why, thou idling varlet!" exclaimed a voice close beside her. "Wert not strictly told not to tarry a moment, and thou hast been gone nigh these two hours past—a murrain on thee."

"Oh, master!" bawled Humphrey, most lustily, writhing under the punishment he was receiving. Hurt me no more, I pray you. Mercy, good master! In honest truth I tarried no more than I could help."

"Indeed, Master Shakspeare, he is not to blame, for I was hindered from coming," cried the old woman. "But tell me, I beseech you, how fareth your sweet wife?"

"Badly, as she needs must, when she hath been crying out for you so long," answered he, as if somewhat out of humour.

"Well, dear heart, lead you the way, I will haste to her without a moment's more delaying," said the Gammer, in a sort of coaxing voice; upon which Humphrey, picking up his lanthorn, and quite forgetting his fear in the cudgelling he had lately had, although, in honest truth, he had been scarce hurt at all,—seeing his master and the midwife moving off as fast as they could—kept close to their heels till they reached John Shakspeare's dwelling in Henley Street.

CHAPTER II.

At first THE INFANT.
SHAKSPEARE.

Porter. On my Christian conscience, this one christening will beget a thousand; here will be father, godfather, and all together.
Man. The spoons will be the bigger, sir,
IBID.

He ruleth all the roast
With bragging and with boast,
Borne up on every side
With pomp and with pride.
JOHN SKELTON.

No quarrelling, for God's sake! Truly if you do, I shall set a knave between ye.
THOMAS HEYWOOD. (*A Woman Killed with Kindness.*)

Now was there an admirable jovial company assembled at the dwelling of Dame Shakspeare, to do honour to the christening of her child, and among them were many of the worthy burgesses of Stratford; for be it understood, John Shakspeare was known to be a thriving man, and such are sure to have no lack of acquaintances; and his excellent partner having come of a family of some repute in those parts, being no other than the heiress of Arden, was much looked up to; and, as she appeared unto all, of an honest kind heart and admirable sweet nature, she possessed every one's good word. Of which the consequence was, the house could scarce contain the company the occasion had assembled. Some stood about the porch jesting and making merry; others were in the garden, especially of the younger sort, amusing themselves with pleasant talk one with another. One or two decent motherly dames were in the kitchen bustling to and fro, looking to the dinner, of which a huge fire covered with pots and kettles, and having a famous large joint at the spit, a little ragged urchin kept turning—being well minded of all not to let it burn—shewed some preparation—the whilst a stout wench with famous red cheeks and elbows, evidently in her best finery, along with Humphrey, in his Sunday jerkin, kept hurrying in and out, laden with knives, napery, drinking vessels, trenchers, and other needful things at a feasting.

In the best chamber of the whole house which looked to be newly strewed with fresh rushes, and garnished here and there with such flowers as were in season, some in china bowls, and some in parcel-gilt goblets, there was a large recess, made by that end of the room abutting out into the street, wherein were most of the principal personages of the company. First, for, in respect of his calling, I would give him precedency of the others, there sat Sir Nathaniel the curate, easily to be known by his portly person, his merry eye, his loud laugh, and his free speech. It was bruited abroad that he loved good living better than became a churchman, and his maple face and famous round belly, did confirm such tales wonderfully. In apparel he was slovenly, and not over clean in his linen; but being of a ready wit and of a cheerful humour, he went on from day to day feasting wherever there was any store of victual, a welcome if not an honoured guest. Beside him was one Stripes the schoolmaster, and, as folks said, a notable conjuror, who had a very lean look with him, and wore such garments as seemed to be clean past all recovery of tailoring, they were so threadbare. By what was going on, it appeared as if he was content to be the butt of the other, for he took in good part all the jests the curate aimed at his shrunk shanks, his lanthorn jaws, his darned hose, and his old fashioned doublet, and moreover assented to what the other said, with a readiness that savoured much of servility. Nearer this way sat a substantial looking yeoman, by name Richard Hathaway, clad in honest homespun, in deep discourse with a neighbouring wealthy sheep farmer, concerning the market price of wool, the state of the crops, and the like matters. A knot of burgesses were standing round two aldermen of the town, who were debating very stoutly upon business connected with the corporation; and the parish-clerk, a little dumpy man, with monstrous thick legs, was leaning half out of the casement, in earnest talk with some one in the street below.

At the further end of the chamber were all the women congregated, apparelled in their very best, and talking as though none had a mind to listen. The rich farmer's wife, sitting very stately in a robe of fine scarlet, with a white hood, a gay purse, and a bunch of keys at her side, hanging from a silken belt of silver tissue; whilst her waist was bound with a sash of grass-green silk richly embroidered, no lack of jewels about her, and on each finger two rings at least, divided the admiration of her companions with the aldermen's wives in watchet-coloured tunics and fringed kirtles, with golden coifs and other costly toys, wherewith they had attired themselves. In the midst of them sat Dame Shakspeare, modestly and matronly clad, and without doubt, as seemly a woman as any there, looking contented and happy, and giving very earnest thanks to her good friends and guests as they made up to her with some pretty gift or another—mayhap, a set of apostle spoons, or a standing cup of silver, or a gilt bowl, for the boy, who, with the chrisom-cloth about him in token of his recent baptism, lay in the arms of his nurse—a rosy faced dame, who stood beside her mistress commending of the babe to all comers above all babes that ever lived. And lastly, by the door, giving a hearty welcome to all who entered, dressed in an excellent suit of Lincoln green, and having as cheerful a face as man ever wore, stood worthy John Shakspeare, the giver of the feast.

"Come in, neighbours! I pray you, come in!" exclaimed he, as some were entering. "I am heartily glad to see you, and my good dame be as ready to give you a welcome I'll be bound for't. Well met, Thomas Hart! Robert Bruce, I commend me to your good will. Worthy Hamnet Sadler, I am much beholden to you for this visit. Ha, Oliver Dumps!" cried he, as his eyes lighted on a melancholy looking little man, in a new leather jerkin and black karsie hose. "Though most men hugely mislike visits of the constable, I greet you well."

"God requite you, neighbour," answered the man, not altering a whit the solemness of his aspect.

"Methinks, we are all indifferently honest," continued his host. "Yet are we well inclined you should exercise your office amongst us with as little hindrance as may be."

"Marry, 'tis a villanous world!" exclaimed the constable. "But if any dishonesty hath been done, point me out the knave, that I may take him up before his worship."

"Nay, by your leave, not so," replied the other. "If you are for taking up, we are only willing you should take up the dinner: but with such an offender we doubt not being able to play the high bailiff as well as any in the county, and would on the instant commit him to safe custody, in our own keeping." Thereupon there was a laugh of those around; for when the host taketh upon himself to jest, even if his wit be not of the brightest, the guests must lack good manners sadly, if their mirth break not out at it without stinting.

"See you, John a Combe?" enquired the buxom wife of one of the aldermen to the other, as they now stood somewhat apart from the rest, observing the scene I have endeavoured to describe.

"Ay, yonder is he, Mistress Alderman Malmsey," replied the other, pointing to one who had just entered, and seemed by his apparel to be somewhat of a gallant, for he was very daintily dressed in a new puce-coloured doublet, with scarlet hose, buff shoes, and fine rosettes to them: a well starched ruff below his beard, and a handsome rapier at his girdle.

"By our Lady, Mistress Alderman Dowlas, he beareth himself bravely," exclaimed the first.

"I'faith, methinks he is as pretty a man as any of his inches," added the other.

"And then to note how civilly he behaveth himself," continued Dame Malmsey. "He ever speaketh of us women in such delicate respectful terms as would do a woman's heart good to hear; and if any so much as insinuate ought to our prejudice, it moveth him so, he will be ready to fight the biggest man of them all."

"And yet I marvel he should still remain a bachelor," observed Dame Dowlas. "He cannot be less than a good manly age, for as Master Alderman, my husband, hath told me, it was twenty-five years come Whitsuntide, since old John a Combe bought his wedding suit of his father; and that he is well accommodated for a wife there can be no question, seeing that he hath ever a fair sum of money in his purse at a friend's need, and old John a Combe hath the reputation of well filled coffers."

"Perchance the old man is not willing his son should marry," said her companion. "Or, mayhap, thinks it fit he should wed with none but the chiefest families, for he hath taken infinite pains, and spared not the cost, he should have as good schooling as any in the land; whereof the consequence is, you shall find young John a Combe one of the properest gentlemen to be met with in all Warwickshire."

"Certes, he seemeth not to affect one more than another," exclaimed Dame Malmsey. "But I would wager my best kirtle, there is never a maid for five miles round Stratford, who would not give her ears to have him for a husband."

"In all sincerity I say it, I wish he may find a wife worthy of him," said the other, to which her companion added a like sincere wish. In the meanwhile, the object of their friendly commendations passed across the chamber, very courteously returning the courtesies of those he met,—and few were there that did not hasten to greet him, as soon as they caught sight of him at his entrance, which shewed in what estimation he was. These as quickly as he well could he parted from, and made up to Dame Shakspeare, who, with a face radiant with her choicest smiles, gave him her hand at his approach.

"I beseech you, pardon me, I have come so late," said he to her, in a very soft gentlemanlike voice; "I have been detained against my will, else would I have been here long since."

"I pray you, trouble not yourself about it," replied she, with an excellent pleasant kindness. "Believe me you are infinitely welcome, Master Combe, honour our poor dwelling when you will."

"In sooth, I regret exceedingly not having sooner paid my respects to our young master here," added he, looking from the smiling mother to the pretty babe, with a delighted countenance. "For never saw I, in all my days, a child whose exquisite comeliness made earliest acquaintance so desirable."

"Nay, sweet Sir, it is your goodness that maketh you think so," replied she, though pleased beyond measure at the compliment.

"An it please your worship, it be very exquisite comeliness, indeed!" exclaimed the nurse with some emphasis, as she held out the child to be seen by him more conveniently. "In all honesty I say it, I know not the babe so choicely featured. I pray you, note how fair a forehead it hath—the hair, no silk ever was of such marvellous fineness—here are cheeks that bees would cluster at taking them to be such delicate rarities as they have had no experience of—but the eyes. I pray your worship, look at these eyes! What pretty twinklers they be! So mild, so soft, so loving, and so roguish withal! 'Ifaith, eyes of so rare a sort surely no child ever had; and as for this dainty little mouth—if there shall be found any cherry so tempting to look upon, I am no true woman."

"O' my life, he is wonderfully pretty!" cried John a Combe, gazing with an admiring eye upon its many attractions.

"Dost think so, really?" asked the happy mother.

"But then it hath such strange, wise, notable ways with it as exceed all my cunning to describe," continued the nurse, jumping her charge up and down a-bit as nurses do. "And for a curious nature, his exceedeth all comprehension. There shall nothing pass in his presence unnoticed of him; and if anything new come within his reach, doubt not he will have hold of it in a presently; nay, his curiousness is of so extreme a sort, that if he but get sight of a thing, he will allow of no peace till he have it in his hand, and thereby gain some knowledge what stuff it be made of."

"Methinks, nurse, there is much sign of after wisdom in being so early a learner," observed John a Combe.

"Ay, an it please your worship, that is there, I'll warrant you," replied she. "Then as for his temper, he is so sweetly disposed, none can help loving him. He is none of your cross-grained, restless, ill-behaved little brats that be ever a squalling and bawling from morning till night, disturbing of every one—not he by my halidom! for he is so peaceable, you might live in the house and not know a babe was in it. He goeth to sleep just when it is proper for him, and wakes himself up only at such times as may be most convenient for him to be looked to. In short, I will be bound for't, his like is not to be found in this world; and if he come not to be a bishop, or at least a justice o' the peace, I shall be hugely mistaken in him."

"O my word, nurse, you have mighty hopes of him," exclaimed Dame Shakspeare, gazing fondly, and somewhat proudly, on the object of so much eulogy, as it lay dandling in the arms of her attendant. "In good truth, I cannot expect for the boy any such famous fortune, and should be well satisfied, could I be assured he would live to play the part of an honest man, and die in the estimation of his fellows."

"If such be your desire, believe me the assurance is easily come at," remarked John a Combe, courteously; "for it is manifest from what nurse hath said of him, that he possesses his mother's excellent rare virtues, and with such commendable gifts he cannot fail to realize all honourable expectation."

"I am proud of your good opinion, worthy Master Combe," answered she, with the unaffectedness of a truly modest woman. "It shall at least keep me at my powerfulest endeavours to deserve it better."

"As some small token of my regard, I beseech you, accept of me this poor trifle for your sweet son," said he, as he produced a very daintily wrought silver cup and cover.

"Beshrew my heart, but that is as pretty a present for a babe as I have seen this many a day," exclaimed the nurse; and then addressing the infant, as she let him rise and fall in her arms, cried out, "Hoity toity, my young master! thou hast a goodly store of friends methinks! But thou deservest it every bit, thou dost, thou pretty rogue!" And then she fell to tickling of him with one hand upon his chest, whilst she held him by the other, till the babe laughed after so delicate a fashion as was exquisite to see.

"I feel too much beholden to you, worthy Master Combe, to say aught of the matter," said the delighted mother.

"And here, nurse," he added, taking out of his purse a piece of silver, which he placed in her hands; "is some small token you should bestow your best attentions on this my young friend here."

"That will I, your worship, depend on't, and a million of thanks for your worship's largess," exclaimed the other, dropping a curtsey, as she accepted the coin. "Well, commend me to Master Combe, for a true gentleman!" continued she, as soon as he had retired to another part of the chamber.

"He is ever so," answered her mistress. "He giveth signs of a most liberal heart, and is at all times a ready mean for the doing of any good. Perchance one might travel many miles, and not meet with so good a neighbour, so true a friend, or so worthy a Christian."

"Now, neighbours! now, friends! an it please you in to dinner," cried John Shakspeare; on the instant, all were in preparation to obey the welcome summons, and John a Combe hurrying back to Dame Shakspeare, gallantly led the way with her, followed by the rest of the company, till he had placed her in her proper seat. After Sir Nathaniel had said grace, the company sat down to a dinner that would have gladdened any but to have beheld; for there was brought upon the table a famous store of all things in season, with plenty of excellent liquor, both ale and cider; and all set to with good appetites, and with an evident determination to enjoy the cheer that had been provided for them. Of these, none so distinguished himself as did the curate and the schoolmaster. Stripes sat nearly bolt upright in his chair, as serious as a judge and as ravenous as a wolf; yet there was not so glaring an impudency in his proceedings as was in the other, for he was not importunate—he waited to be asked—eat what was given him—was ready again; and with small pressing, continued at it till long after all else had done.

The host and hostess seemed ever anxious that each person should have what he liked, and plenty of it, and kept Maud the girl, and Humphrey the boy, at their vigilance, supplying of what was needed, whilst John a Combe busied himself in pressing those nighest him to make good cheer, and looked as if he cared not what he had himself as long as the rest fared well. Of a surety every one appeared to enjoy himself to his heart's content: nor were the women altogether unmindful of the bountiful hospitality that had garnished the board; for they eat and praised, and smiled in such a sort as shewed how well they were pleased with their entertainment.

At last the meal was over, the dishes removed, and in their stead the tables were covered with a plentiful variety of cakes, such fruit as could be got, Marchpane, apples and comfits, stewed prunes and dishes of other preserves, syllabubs for the younger folks made of new milk and verjuice, and wine for the elders of two or three several kinds; besides which, John Shakspeare was brewing a goodly bowl of sack with sugar in it, for such as affected such delicate drink, of whom the two aldermen were most conspicuous, swearing there was no such liquor in the world, whilst his excellent sweet wife opposite was preparing a jug of spiced ale, such liquor being desired, above all others, by such of her guests as were farmers or yeomen; ever and anon saying something to the nurse, who was standing behind her chair with the babe in her arms; or acknowledging, with some few gracious words, the courtesies of John a Combe, who sat nigh her, and by his own readiness took heed that she should have every thing she needed ready at her hand. The jingling of glasses, and the like noises, caused by the moving of bottles, and other drinking vessels, having in some degree subsided, and all having before them what they most desired, it was observed that John a Combe stood up with his glass filled in his hand; and, with some ado, the rude prating of Sir Nathaniel being stopped, he was heard to speak after this fashion :—

"My worthy good neighbours and friends! There is a custom, now of old standing in this our very dear country, which methinks should be held in good esteem of all true English hearts: to wit, the drinking of healths, which, I take it, is a great encourager of honest love; and keepeth true friendship in excellent remembrance among all men. Now it may be known unto you that this same estimable custom is in most request amongst those of old acquaintance. Therefore I beseech you pardon me, if on this occasion I require of you to follow the custom with some alteration. There is no old familiar friend I would now ask your remembrance of; but one whose very name hath been unknown to you till this day. I cannot point out to you what noticeable virtues he hath shewn, worthy of your commendation; for as yet I have been so little in his company, he hath not had time to shew his goodness to me; but knowing his father's extreme honesty of soul, and his mother's manifold excellences of nature, I am assured he cannot fail to have in him such bountiful gifts, as in good time must bring to him all good men's affections. Neighbours! I pray you, with full cups, join with me very heartily in drinking—health to our young friend William Shakspeare, a long life and a prosperous!"

Methinks there should be no need to assure the reader that the desire of John a Combe was followed on the instant with the sincere good will of all present.

"Well done, John a Combe!" shouted Sir Nathaniel; "O' my life, a truly excellent proper speech: and very scholarly spoken. What sayest Ticklebreech?" cried he familiarly to the schoolmaster, who sat over against him. "Is not the speech a sound speech, ay, and a notable speech, ay, and a speech of marvellous discretion?"

"An' it please your reverence," replied Stripes, looking all the whilst as solemn as if it was a matter of life or death with him; "touching the speech that hath lately had utterance amongst us, I will make so bold as to say, that a properer speech shall not be found, even should you seek for it in the choicest of Demosthenes his Philippics, or of Cicero his Orations. It is a speech that hath in it these several excellences—excellence of matter—excellence of rhetoric—and excellence of—"

"It may be known of all here I am no scholar, like unto our good friend and neighbour Master Combe," observed John Shakspeare, with his honest cheerful face all of a glow, and to the complete cutting short of the schoolmaster in what threatened to be an exceeding prosy discourse. "Yet had I what I lack the most, I doubt it would do me such good office as sufficiently to assure him of the full great love I bear him in my heart for the friendliness he hath shewn to me and mine on this and other occasions. Fain would I dilate concerning of what numberless famous proofs he hath exhibited of the generousness of his humour, but that I know none of you stand in any ignorance of them. From his earliest life he hath been given to all manner of truly estimable virtues; and now his riper manhood, in its thorough honesty and free-heartedness, declareth what proper effect hath come of the exceeding virtuousness of his youth. I feel proud that Stratford can boast of such a one; and I pray you, pardon me, when I add, my pride is none the less at finding that such a one should hold me in his commendation; for, as I take it, to be well spoken of is ever to be desired; but the praise of the praiseworthy is a thing beyond all price. In testimony that your opinion accordeth with mine own, I beseech you, neighbours, join with me in drinking to the health of our worthy townsman, John a Combe, desiring that he may long continue to live amongst us, in the same pride and honour as he doth at this present."

"Marry, but this looketh to be the properest speech of the two!" exclaimed Sir Nathaniel, as all prepared themselves—and with evidence of great good will—to do as their host would have them; "what sayest, Pedagogus?"

"Indeed, and as your reverence out of your singular wisdom hath observed," said the schoolmaster, refraining awhile from the pippin he was a moment since intent upon adding to the great mass of victual that had gone before it. "It be out of all comparison the properest speech. In short, it shall be found, on the very searchingest examination, of so proper a sort, that its fellow shall not be met with, seek where you will."

Much more of the same poor stuff he might have added, had not the voice of John a Combe sent him, nothing loath, to the munching of his pippin; for he was of that well-disposedness, he would hold his prate when his betters were talking; but among poorer folk he would say out his say, were it a mile to the end: and heed none, should they talk ever so. Master Combe, thereupon, quickly disclaimed any title to praise for whatever he had done; asserting that it was what every man should do, regardless of all else but the good that came of it. This brought others to speak, especially the aldermen and burgesses of his particular acquaintance, who in homely fashion gave their evidence of his worthiness. In fact, every one appeared anxious to say in what great estimation he was held of them—only with one solitary exception. Of the company was one Master Buzzard, a gentleman of those parts, who, for all he was of better estate than any there, was an ignorant vain person, living in great dissoluteness, with such companions as the priest and the schoolmaster, and other roysterers; and cared for nothing so much as hawking, and spending his time in riotous ill-living among such as were ready to fall into his humour. He was of a middle size, with a strong body and dull look, and affected to mislike anything like niceness in apparel. Indeed, his manners were of the rudest, but being an excellent customer of John Shakspeare, he got invited to the christening. At hearing the praises that were so bountifully lavished upon John a Combe, his soul was stirred with a very devilish envy; and though he said nought—save 'twas to mutter some contemptuous expression, unheard of any but those nighest him—it was easy to be seen that he was in a wonderful ill-humour.

At this time a many of the company were amusing themselves at the game of Barley Break, in the warehouse and places where the wool was stored, and other things in which John Shakspeare dealt; and it did so happen that Master Alderman Dowlas, the draper, was shut up in the middle room, with the buxom wife of his neighbour, Master Alderman Malmsey, the vintner, and he must needs be making love to her, though he had as exquisite fair a wife of his own as any honest man need desire. Now this worthless draper was a man of no particular likelihood to fall in with a pretty woman's fantasy, having features by no means comely: a long thin nose, and a mouth about as expressive of any particular affectionateness as a roll of broadcloath. Indeed, there was a sort of sanctimoniousness in the cut of his beard, and the cropping of his hair, and the sober suit of grey in which he was usually apparelled, that seemed to give the flattest contradiction to love of any sort—unless it were the love of godliness and a decent life. Whether what he had been drinking put into his head any such villany, or that he was of a very amorously disposed nature at all times, I know not; but certain it is, he left the table to play at Barley Break—of an equal surety it is he was, in the course of the game, shut up in the middle room with the young comely wife of his brother alderman; and it is beyond all contradiction that, after flattering "the very infiniteness of her most absolute and inconceivable beauty," as he was pleased to style her somewhat attractiveness, in a sufficiency that ought to have satisfied the vainest woman that ever lived, he, in a monstrous earnestness, swore he loved her better than ought else in the universal world.

"Fie on you, Jonathan Dowlas!" cried the pretty woman, evidently, from the twinkling of her merry dark eyes, taking the affair as an excellent good jest. "I marvel you should so conduct yourself to your friend's wife, and you a godly man too—that hath been married this seven year!—as I live, methinks it is too bad of you!"

"Alack, adorable sweet creature!" cried the alderman, twitching his chair as nigh as possible to hers, the which she marked by immediately increasing the distance betwixt them. "'Tis all on account of the insufficiency of the flesh. The flesh rebelleth against all discretion. It stirreth as it were—yea, it be exceedingly moved!"

"I would it would move farther off, then," exclaimed his fair companion, as she removed herself a short distance, upon finding him again attempting to get closer to her than she liked.

"Sweet Mistress Malmsey," continued the draper, very pathetically, "as the hart panteth for the water brooks, doth my enamoured soul thirst after thine incomparable sweet perfections."

"Then you must quench your thirst at other fountains, I promise you," pithily replied the vintner's wife. "My husband hath a famous store of wines. I doubt not, if you would give him an order for some, a draught or so occasionally would do you, out of all comparison, more benefit than would the draining of my incomparable sweet perfections to the dregs; for, take my word for't, you would find me horrible bad drinking."

"Nay, that could never be, my honey-sweet!" exclaimed the Alderman, trying to take her hand, which she presently snatched away from him. "Sooner shall princes wear buckram, and penniless rogues ruffle it in costliest cloth of gold. Believe me, as I love ready money better than credit, and large profits before any loss, I shall grow into a desperation, succeed I not in my suit."

"Your suit is like to go unshod, for it is bootless," answered Mistress Malmsey, with a pretty laugh at her own jest; then added, more seriously, "Marry, to prevent such a mischance as your falling into a desperation, I would acquaint your wife with your desires, and doubt not at all she'd suit you in a presently."

The Alderman looked as if he relished not this raillery. He spoke never a word for a minute or so. What more he might have said, I know not, for soon after, by the chances of the game, they were released from their imprisonment, and she allowed him no more opportunity of having such conversation with her that day. In the mean time, they at the table were still jovially employed in making good cheer. John a Combe was intent upon setting of every one to enjoy themselves after such fashion as pleased them most, and seeing that all had proper refreshments when their sports had tired them in any way. John Shakspeare was employed in a like manner, and so was his good dame; whereof the consequence was, as hath been acknowledged many times since, that there never was known, at any merry-making, such a general contentation of the guests: and he who was the cause of this great content, lacked no honour which the occasion seemed to warrant. He was praised as bountifully as if each had taken a cue from the nurse—all the women must needs have a kiss of him; and divers among those nigh unto marriageable estate, would not be satisfied without dangling him a bit in their arms—mayhap to shew certain of the young men there, how apt they were at so notable an exercise. At last, having been caressed and praised of all with a liberality that exceedeth conception, amid much regret of the young folks, nurse took him away—as, in sooth, it was high time he should be asleep in his cradle.

Master Buzzard continued at the table eyeing, with a marvellous sour and gloomy aspect, the attentions that were paid to John a Combe; and it fretted him to find that he, for all his greater state, was held in no such estimation. Along with him were Sir Nathaniel, Stripes, and Oliver Dumps; and sometimes others would join them for a time, upon getting weary of their sports; but these four appeared to like nothing so well as continual tippling of such liquors as were before them, seasoned with such talk as persons so disposed were most like to affect.

"It may be, or it may not be," observed Sir Nathaniel, after rehearsing to his listeners a scandalous story; "but here is a child found, and, as far as my learning may go, I know of no child having been born without the help of a mother. What sayest, Sir Conjuror?"

"There can be no doubt of it, please your reverence," replied the schoolmaster. Though it hath been asserted, by divers creditable historians, that Venus sprung from the foam of the sea, and Minerva from the brain of Jove; for mine own part, I would maintain, yet with all due deference, the utter impossibility of any one person coming into this world without having to boast of a mother, and perchance, if there should be no doubt on't, of a father also."

"Thou art a fool, old hocus pocus, and no conjuror!" exclaimed the curate, sharply, "a very fool, and as ignorant as a heathen. Had Adam a mother, or Eve? Surely thou hast forgotten thy Testament—thou Balaam's ass! But thou never wert half so wise an animal as he; for it be well known of all men, that once upon a time, when he was carrying of Potiphar's wife into Egypt, he spake unto Moses, saying, 'Paul! Paul! thou almost persuadest me to be a Christian.'"

"Methinks asses must have been wiser in those days than they be now," said the constable, gravely. "My father hath had an ass of his own a long time past, but it never gave any sign of speech."

"It hath begun at last, then—*ecce signum*;" cried Sir Nathaniel, laughing humorously, in which he was joined by his companions. "But touching this child. It doth appear that Dame Lucy made discovery of a young child that had been abandoned, as it was said; and as it could not have been Sir Thomas Lucy's, it could not, with any toleration, be Sir Thomas Lucy's wife's. That child the good dame had me christen, some short time since, by the name of Mabel; and she hath resolved, as she told me, to bring it up as her own; the which she must needs do with the perfectest likeness that ever was, for many do say she hath other right to it than that of first discoverer."

"By God's body, it be infamous!" cried Master Buzzard, in a rude loud voice that attracted the attention of all within reach of it. "The vileness of these women hath no rivalry save the craft with which they hide it. They are traitors to honesty, all of them; and I would as soon believe in the trustworthiness of a cut-purse, as I would in the virtuousness of any one of them."

"An' it please you, Master Buzzard, the Queen's Highness, whose unworthy constable I am, is a woman, as I have heard," here remarked Oliver Dumps, with the air of one who cometh to the resolution of doing his duty though it be unpleasant to him. "And though no later than yesterday I did put in the stocks, for wantonness, one Marian Loosefish, a woman also, as in my conscience I do firmly believe; yet as it seemeth to me it be like to bring her majesty's name into contempt among all her loving subjects—the which be against the law—to say that women be given to all manner of villany, and to assert, at the same time, that the Queen's Highness is a woman, I must maintain it, by virtue of my office, that if all women may be queans, then is the queen no woman."

"Pooh!" exclaimed Master Buzzard.

"But I will not have it 'pooh,'" cried the constable, raising his voice, and seeming in some indignation. "It be flat contumaciousness, and very sedition. I will allow of it on no account; and I charge you, on your allegiance declare the Queen's Highness no woman, or any such vileness, else will I straight with you to the cage."

"What, wouldst put a gentleman in the cage?" cried Sir Nathaniel, as if in some surprise. "Hath no respect for persons?"

"No, nor for parsons either, should they conduct themselves unadvisedly," answered the little man, determinedly. "I am put in authority for the preservation of the peace, and it behoveth me to keep good heed there be no idle prating like to lead to a brawl."

"The man's an ass," said Master Buzzard, in very evident contempt.

"The man is no ass, Master Buzzard," exclaimed Oliver Dumps, jumping up on his legs in a sort of fury. "And moreover, as can be proved at any time, the man never was an ass, but an honest householder, and the queen's officer; and one who careth only to do whatsoever may be required of him without offence to any man, and seeketh to live as becometh a proper subject of her highness and a good Christian. You have miscalled me villanously, Master Buzzard—I will not put up with any such ill usage from the finest fellow that wears a head. I will have you up at our next hall—you shall be brought before his worship the high bailiff. I will have my action of slander against you, depend on't."

"Hullo, my masters! what hath caused this unseemly to do amongst you?" called out John a Combe, as, drawn by the constable's loud voice, and violent manner, he, with others, was attracted to the table. "I marvel, on such an occasion as this, to see any quarrelling. I pray you, say the matter of difference betwixt you, that I may do my best, as speedy as may be, to bring it to an amicable ending."

"Marry, this is it," replied Oliver, in no way abating the greatness of his indignation, whilst Master Buzzard sat with a perfect indifferency, mingled with some scorn, of the whole business, rocking himself on his chair, "Master Buzzard hath given me ill words, and I will have the law of him; moreover, he hath spoke shamefully of the queen's grace, for the which he shall have to make proper amends; and, lastly, he hath insinuated evil opinions of my lady, the wife of his worship Sir Thomas Lucy, in particular, and of all women in general, saying that they be notoriously dishonest, and ever given to unlawful behaviour."

"What he hath spoke ill of you, worthy Master Constable, be sure he said in jest," remarked John a Combe. "And I cannot believe you to be so unneighbourly as to allow of such a thing moving you."

"Nay, but he hath called me an ass, Master Combe, and there be no jest in that as I can see," cried out the offended constable.

"He meant it as a jest, depend on't," replied the other.

"Ay, 'twas a jest out of all doubt," here observed Sir Nathaniel, just after draining his goblet. "Didst not take it for a jest, Ticklebreech?" added he, turning to his companion.

"O' my life yes, an' it please your reverence," answered the schoolmaster; "as excellent good jest as ever I heard."

"Well, an' it be a jest, indeed," said Oliver Dumps, in a quieter tone; "believe me I was ignorant of it, else would I have said nought of the matter, for I am not so crabbed as to take offence where none be intended; but what saith he concerning of his ill speech of the queen? that was no jest, at least he will find it none, I warrant you."

"You must have misunderstood his meaning surely?" observed John a Combe. "'Tis not at all in reason that one known to be so well disposed towards her Majesty as is Master Buzzard, should say so much as one single word to her prejudice."

"If he said not all women be mere wantons, count me the lyingest knave in Christendom," asserted the constable with some vehemence.

"Perchance he may have said it, but that he had any such meaning will I never believe," remarked Master Combe.

"I will wager my life on it he had a very different meaning," exclaimed the curate. Then called he to his sworn-fellow, "What sayest, Lanthorn-jaws?"

"Please your reverence, I will vouch for it, his meaning must needs have been of a clean contrary sort," readily answered the schoolmaster.

"Marry then, since that be the opinion of these honest gentlemen, I will not stir in the matter further," said Oliver. "I would torture no man's speech to do him hurt, not I, even though I might be made alderman to-morrow for't. But touching my lady, Sir Thomas Lucy's wife, I heard of a child she had found and bringeth up as her own, of the which, if I remember me, Master Buzzard believeth the good lady to be the mother, without consent first had and obtained of his worship, her husband; and this I take it, can be no other than scandalum magnatum—a terrible heinous offence as I have heard."

"I cannot believe Master Buzzard would speak of such a matter, save as the common talk of the vulgar sort, who know no better," said John a Combe. "For mine own part, there is nothing of which I am so well assured as of the wonderful excellence of woman. All that extreme force of rhetoric could speak, or most famous cunning of the pen could describe, in my humble opinion could never give her such sufficient justice as her infinite merits deserve. Whatever there is of goodness—whatever there is of kindness, of pitifulness of heart, and of nobleness of disposition, have their chiefest place in her, and she is the origin of that marvellous sweet power that gives humanity its rarest excellence, and binds all nature in one unending chain that never rusts, that will not clog, and that cannot be sundered—the links whereof are those endearing sympathies that join to form the universal bondage of the affections. Such bountiful store of graces doth she possess, that although poets from earliest time have been endeavouring to make them known to the world, in our own day such attractions as have escaped notice, are found to be out of all number; and it hath been well asserted, the same is like to continue to latest posterity. Methinks there shall be no need of saying ought to shew what great share she hath in the production of everything that tendeth to happiness in this world, for you cannot help knowing that all true pleasure is of her giving. Of her excellence I would content myself with asking—What virtue is like to a woman's?—What honesty is like to a woman's?—What love, what courage, what truth, what generousness, what self-denial, what patience under affliction, and forgiveness for wrong come at all nigh unto such as a woman sheweth? Believe me the man who cannot honour so truly divine a creature, is an ignorant poor fellow, whom it would be a compliment to style a fool; or an ungrateful mean wretch, whom charity preventeth me from calling a villain."

"Thou liest, knave!" shouted Master Buzzard, starting to his feet, and drawing his rapier, and looking to be in a monstrous deadly rage. "Thou art thyself but a paltry villain as ever lived, and a coward to boot, as I will presently prove—so come on, or I will make no more account of thy pestilent body than I would of a stinking mackerel."

"Aid in the Queen's name, you that be good men and true!" exclaimed the constable, amidst the shrieks of the women and the outcries of the men, as he bustled up between the expected combatants.

"Put down your weapon, Master Buzzard, I pray you," cried John Shakspeare, hastening with others to the scene.

"I will cut off thy ears as a supper for my dogs!" continued Master Buzzard, seeming to increase in his passion.

"A riot! a riot! Surrender you my prisoner in the Queen's name!" added Oliver Dumps, advancing close to the offender, as if with the intention of seizing him.

"Out fool, or I will pin thee to the wall!" shouted Master Buzzard, making a pass at the constable, the which to avoid he made a leap of so prodigious a length, it hath been said he never did such a feat before, or since.

"Oh, here will be a foul murder done!" exclaimed Dame Shakspeare, pitiously wringing of her hands.

"Come on fellow, and take thy death!" cried Master Buzzard, going furiously at John a Combe, who had got his weapon out in readiness to defend himself, but ere his opponent reached within thrusting distance, John Shakspeare had fast hold of his arm, and others springing on him at the same moment, he was soon deprived of all means of offence.

"I marvel a person of your quality should be for a quarrel at such a time as this," observed his host.

"It's fitting such a pitiful coxcomb of a fellow should preach to me," cried the other very furiously, striving to break from those who held him.

"Hold him fast, good neighbours!" exclaimed Oliver Dumps, now coming nearer, seeing that his prisoner was disarmed. "Let him go on no account, I pray you. He hath sought to do me deadly injury in the execution of my office, and it cannot but go hard with him at assize."

"I beseech you, pass it over!" said John a Combe. "It was but some sudden heat of temper in him, and I doubt not he will regret it in the morning."

"Away, coward—I spit at thee!" shouted Master Buzzard, in a fiercer rage than ever, as he was being borne out at the door. "I do long to be at thee. I would make more holes in thy body than shall be found in a sieve."

"Bring him along, neighbours," cried the constable; "We'll spoil this killing humour of his, I promise you."

Master Buzzard was forcibly carried out of the house, yet without any rudeness on the part of his bearers, who, because of his quality, were loth he should be punished for his brawling,—and, after much opposition from Oliver Dumps wanting to be thought the queen's trusty officer, who liked not of an offence being hushed up,—it was agreed that no notice should be taken of it, on condition of the offender's going peaceably home. In the mean time, the guests recovering from their alarm, got to dancing a measure, and other diversions, as if nought had happened to disturb their sports, and went not away till late, vowing that of all the merry meetings they had been at, for the pleasure they had had, none had been like to the christening of William Shakspeare.

CHAPTER III.

These things begin
To look like dangers, now, worthy my fates.
Fortune, I see thy worst; let doubtful states,
And things uncertain hang upon thy will;
Me surest death shall render certain still.

BEN JONSON.

I held it ever
Virtue and cunning were endowments greater
Than nobleness and riches: careless heirs
May the two latter darken and expend;
But immortality attends the former,
Making a man a god.

SHAKSPEARE.

Their angry looks, their deadly daunting blows,
Might witness well that in their hearts remained
As cankered hate, disdain, and furious mood,
As ever bred in bear or tiger's breast.

GASCOYNE.

"SAUL, what art doing."

"Looking to see that the gesses and bells of this tercel gentle be in the properest trim, master."

"Ay, well thought of—but, as I have ever marked, thou hast wonderful foresight."

"Marry, my sight be good enough—methinks I can trace a hawk as well as any."

"In truth thou hast many commendable qualities, and I would fain give some token of how well esteemed they are of me."

"Indeed! but that be kind of you, master, monstrous kind: and as for my qualities, I doubt they be anything out of the common. Peradventure I am as cunning at the rearing of hawks as any fellow in Warwickshire—at quarter staff, wrestling, pitch the bar, running at the quintain, and other games, care for none; and will dance a morrice, play the hobby-horse in the May games, or take a fling at a Shrove-tide cock, with as much perfectness as you shall see among a thousand."

His master was silent for a minute or so; yet his aspect wore a troubled, and by no means pleasing expression, that looked as if he wanted to disburthen his mind of something. For awhile he kept feeding of a hawk he held on his wrist. His companion was a sturdy varlet of some thirty years, with a freckled face, a thick clumsy head, and features expressive of one alike reckless and impudent. He was clad in a forester's frock of Kendal green, confined at the waist with a belt, having a pocket at the side, below which little could be seen, save his crimson hose and thick bull boots; and he wore a rapier and a dagger. Of these two the one was Master Buzzard, of whom the reader hath already some knowledge, and the other was his man Saul, his chief favourite and confidant. They were together in the hall, once a fair chamber in Master Buzzard's house, with a famous timber roof, and a goodly store of old armour hung about, but on account of the great number of hawks and dogs that were kept in it, some being here and some there—a litter of pups in one corner and a cast of falcons in another, with lurchers, deer-hounds, and spaniels of every kind, running in and out of every hole and corner, with little regard to cleanliness, the place was scarce fit for any human being to be in. All amongst the corslets and plates of mail, were nailed the skins of herons and the tails of foxes; the antlers of a stag, and the heads of divers kinds of wild fowl, badgers, pole-cats, and other vermin; and there seemed to be but little furniture in ordinary use as chair or table, unencumbered with things necessary for hawking, or hunting, or fishing, or some sport of a like nature. On a corner of a long table close to where Master Buzzard was standing, there stood a tray with the remains of a pasty, and a flagon beside it, which was some sign that the place, however unsightly it might be, was not badly off for victual.

"Thou knowest, Saul, how good a master I have been to thee," continued Master Buzzard.

"Ay, by gog's blood, that do I!" exclaimed his man with great earnestness, "and many thanks to your worship. I'faith, there is no denying I am well off for a master, for one more cunning in hunting, and hawking, and all such goodly sports—of a more valorous nature let his weapon be what it may; or of a more truly prodigal disposition, upon any proper occasion, I doubt hugely, I should meet with, sought I ever so. Marry, if your worship is as well off for a servant as am I for a master, then ought we to be envied of all men."

"By God's body, I value not my best goshawk as I do thy faithful service," replied his master, still seeming to keep his attention fixed upon his bird. "In truth, Saul, I do look upon thee as my right hand, and I do intend, before any very long time hath passed, to shew thee such excellent instance of my good will as must rejoice thee infinitely to see."

"'Fore George! master, I want none such," said his companion, albeit with a marvellous lack of sincerity. "Yet, would I on no account baulk the generousness of your humour. I am not unmindful how oft your worship hath stood between me and harm, when a parcel of poor linsey wolsey knaves of the town yonder, went about telling of me the horriblest slanders that ever was heard."

"Ay, it hath been said of many thou wert he who stabbed Daniel Short, of Barston, who was found dead in the meadow," observed the other, regarding of his goshawk with a more intense earnestness. "But I heeded them not. It was sworn before the high bailiff thou didst misuse Joan Springfield at the town end, and he was for proceeding against thee with as much severity as might be; but I stayed him in the matter. And there was much ado made of thy shooting at Daniel Buckthorn, of the Mill; and it would have gone hard with thee had I not stepped in and hushed all up."

"Never was man so abused!" exclaimed Saul with a very monstrous vehemency. "I have enemies, master—scores of them, I promise you; and they be such thorough-going cowards and dastardly poor villains as cannot come with any fair weapon before me, and challenge me with the infamy they would lay to my charge, that I might disprove it on their pestilent bodies, but must needs whisper all manner of the horriblest false stuff that ever was uttered, among such pitiful fools as they can get to listen to them. 'Slife, master! there be no living for such knaves, and an honest man might as well go hang at once as be pestered with them. For mine own part, I do think the ridding of the world of any a very commendable thing; and could I meet with one who had been playing his knave's tricks on your worship, or on any other for whom I am so bound, I would slit his weason for him whenever the time served, and none should be the wiser."

A smile of peculiar meaning appeared on the face of Master Buzzard at this intimation.

"Dost know John a Combe?" enquired the latter with an assumed indifferency.

"Know John a Combe!" exclaimed Saul in some surprise, and with a more evident contempt. "Is he not the errantest skipjack in all the country round?—a fine Sunday gentleman, forsooth! that looks as if he layeth himself up in lavender o' nights that he may smell sweet i' the morning? Why, he is as common as the stocks, and as like to be avoided of all true men as is the pillory or the whipping post. I should as soon expect Gammer Lambswool to inquire for the gossip's bridle, as your worship to ask after John a Combe. 'Sblood! he taketh upon him, too, to come Master Perfection over us, and must needs be seeking to be thought an example of goodness, and wisdom, and every virtue under the sun, thinking to be as famous as Sir Guy of Warwick. I would forfeit a year's wages found I not more virtue in a bunch of nettles than you shall discover in him, search you from now till doomsday."

Master Buzzard sought not to interrupt his man in his speech, for a very excellent reason—because it was much to his liking, the which the other knew full well; for he was a cunning knave, that ever studied to jump with his master's humour at all times, and was aware of what had passed betwixt him and Master Combe, and moreover, was willing enough to reap advantage of it.

"Indeed, I take him to be as scurvy a fellow as any that lives," observed Master Buzzard with wonderful bitterness.

"That is he, out of all doubt," replied his man in much the same sort of spirit. "I hate such popinjays. It be monstrous fine certainly for such a paltry knave as he is to be ever schooling of your worship, as it were——"

"I tell thee, Saul, I will endure his swaggering airs no longer!" exclaimed Master Buzzard, interrupting his man with great fierceness. "He is ever thrusting himself in my way—a murrain on him! I cannot do as is my wont for his pestilent meddling. Wherever he is I must need play mumchance. All run to John a Combe—all bend to John a Combe—all listen to John a Combe! 'Slife! it maketh me mad to see him so noticed, so praised, so courted, whilst his betters must be thrust aside as worthy of no better heed than a mangy cur."

"Doth the caitiff ruffle it so bravely?" enquired the other. "Well, never heard I of such thorough impudency. But what ignorant poor fools must be they who would be led by him! Marry! I am so moved with indignation at the slights put on your worship by so paltry a villain, that I know not what mischief I should be ready to do him."

"But that is not the worst of it," continued his master with more vehemence. "He hath put on me intolerable affronts, and as yet all attempts, seek I when I would, to be revenged of him, have been bootless. No later than this very morning, scarce an hour gone, meeting him alone in the back lane, I drew upon him, thinking I had him sure; but the villain carried some amulet or devilish charm; for though I made my deadliest thrusts with all the skill of which I am master, he remained unhurt, and in a short space my weapon was sent flying out of my hand a full twenty yards; whereupon, with a Judas smile, the villain bowed to me, and wishing me 'good day,' took himself off on the instant."

"O' my life! 'twas but a coward's trick, master!" cried Saul. "I marvel you did not after him and stick him as he went."

"By this hand, I would gladly have done it!" exclaimed his master. "But I was so confounded at the flight of my rapier, and at the fellow's assurance, that I knew not what to be at, and ere I had resolved, he had gone clean out of sight. Doubtless he will go bruit-ing it abroad, as far as he can, how he had me at his mercy and spared my life. 'Sblood!" continued he with an exceeding uneasy and malignant look with him, "methinks I am poorly served when such a fellow as this can do me all manner of offence, and go unharmed."

"Nay, by your leave, master, not so," quickly answered Saul, "when you have had my service in this business, I will be bold to say you shall not count yourself poorly served."

"I would I could be well rid of him," said Master Buzzard in a lower voice.

"If it please you, master, let that be my care," observed the other.

"I hear that he is oft to be met with after dark in the narrow lane at the town end," observed Master Buzzard, his voice gradually sinking to a whisper.

"A goodly place, and a goodly time too," added the other with a sort of half audible laugh, "but mayhap his worship shall choose to go there once too oft—." Thus went they on, as bad men do concert their villanies, half ashamed to look each other in the face, and as their intentions became manifest, dropping their voices to a close whisper, that the evil they would be about might not be heard of any. But in this I can follow them no longer, having game in view more worthy of the reader's attention.

There was a hall to be holden at the town that day, at which the aldermen and others of the corporation had been summoned in such terms as shewed it to be a matter of the very hugest importance that called them together. Whether it related to certain intelligence of some rebellion broke out against the Queen's Highness, to risings of the papists, or to rumours of invasion from the Spaniards, seemed not to be clearly ascertained; for among the honest burgesses who had got note of this extraordinary meeting there were heard as many reasons for it as there were tongues to speak them, whereof the general belief at last rested upon the three above named. That nothing threatened to affect the immediate safety of the town was apparent from the usual air of carelessness and security that prevailed throughout the principal street. Here might be seen a troop of boys fresh broke out from school, hallooing like mad; there a [illegible] of a meaner sort at play, whilst a little one from the school, [illegible] hastening home to his parents, kept casting behind him a wistful look, as if he did long to join in their pastime. One or two big dogs were seen stretched at their length by their master's doors, and now and then some one or another of a smaller kind would dart out of a doorway, yelping at the heels of the noisy children, till one more courageous than his fellows would up with a stone, and send him back yelping louder than he came, making the tailor leap from his board, the cordwainer throw down his lapstone, and the apprentice leave his work, to see what was the hubbub. Here and there careful mothers were calling out of their casements to hasten home their boys, or some provident housewife would be casting a store of victual for the feeding of her stock of fowls, who, with fluttering wings and eager throats, would be seen eagerly flocking towards her.

In several places, there might be observed some two or three of the neighbours conversing soberly and with great shew of earnestness, more particularly about the doors of the principal burgesses; and in front of the casements of Master Alderman Malmsey, the vintner, where there was a famous group, with a horseman in the midst, looking to be so busy of speech as to pay but little heed to the tankards and drinking horns held by some of them. Opposite was the dwelling of Master Alderman Dowlas, the draper, with its lower windows shewing divers rolls of cloth of sundry colours, whilst at the open casement above sat his buxom fair wife, with Mistress Malmsey at her side, plying of her needle with a very commendable industry, and as it seemed, using her tongue with a like speed. Coming down the street was a drove of cows, some of which must needs put their heads in the water-trough before the inn, thinking to have a good drink, but the stable boys would not allow of it, for they drove them off presently, by throwing up their arms, and making a great shouting. A little curly-haired child, scarce big enough to run alone, was standing in the midst of the road, mooing at the cattle as bold as you please, and putting out its little hands as if to prevent them going further; and an elder sister, with a marvellous anxious frightened face, was rushing from a neighbouring door-way to hurry him out of danger. All the casements, and nearly all the doors, stood invitingly open, for it was a hot summer's day at the latter end of June, and every where there were signs of a desire to be relieved of the oppressive sultriness of the atmosphere, either by seeking of the shady place, or where a draught of cooler air might be gained, or by drinking of tankards of cider and other refreshing liquors, wherever they might be had.

For all this gossipping and carelessness on every side, it was noted that one or two of the elder aldermen who were going to the hall, wore visages of exceeding gravity, and seemed intent upon avoiding the approaches of such of their townsmen as they met in their way, with looks so suspicious and fearful, that the latter knew not what to make of it. Presently, there came by John Shakspeare and Master Combe, likewise on their way to the hall; but they looked to be in a more serious humour even than the aldermen, and would on no account stop for any, which was the more strange, because both were well known to be of a most friendly spirit, and had ever cheerfully answered any man's salutation.

"Whither so fast, my master?" shouted Sir Nathaniel, as he popped his fat rosy face out at the casement to call them. "Dost pass so exquisite a house of entertainment as this, at the pace thou art going, when the sun seemeth to be intent upon making of us so many St. Bartholomews? Two rabid dogs could not have behaved less reasonably towards good liquor. Prythee, come and share with us, and doubt not being welcome, even if thou pay for all."

To this invitation the two merely shook their heads and continued on their way, to the huge discontent of the curate and the schoolmaster, who, at the sight of them, expected to have had at least an extra tankard or two without hurt to their own purses.

John Shakspeare and his friend then proceeded without further hindrance to the church, and soon afterwards entered the vestry—a chamber of no great dimensions, furnished only with a long table, at the head of which was a high-backed chair, and on each side were a couple of benches. In the chair was the high bailiff, one Timothy Mallet, the wheelwright. Opposite, on a low stool, with a many papers and two or three huge books before him, sat the diminutive form of Jemmy Catchpole, the town lawyer, who was said to be so learned in the law as to be fitter to be a judge of assize than any living. His sharp grey eyes twinkled with a perpetual restlessness, and his parchment-skin seemed growing of a deeper yellow, as, with pen in his hand, he watched or made notes of the matter proceeding. On each side were seated such of the aldermen as attended, likewise others of the corporation who were not of the aldermen; and Master Alderman Malmsey, with his purple-in-grain countenance and very puncheon of a person, who affected the orator in no small measure, was on his legs, if such round things as he had might be so called, denouncing with a monstrous vehemency a motion, then under discussion, for repairing the parish well. Some listened to him attentively, others were conversing apart, but it might have been noted, that a few wore aspects so anxious as plainly shewed their minds were intent on another matter. His argument was to the effect, that water was a thing which all honest men ought to eschew, unless as at the marriage at Cana it could be turned into wine, and that wine was a thing most absolute and necessary to every man's well doing: therefore, it would be much better to buy a pipe of such fine hippocras as he could sell them, for the use of the corporation, than to apply any of its funds for the repairing of so unprofitable a thing as a well. At this, upstarted at once a baker and a butcher, swearing with equal vehemency, that nothing was so necessary as plenty of bread and meat, and advocating the greater laudableness of laying in a store of such victual, which they could not do better than have of them, to wasting the corporation funds in the project that had so injudiciously been proposed. Others might have followed in a like strain, but at this instant John Shakspeare, who had waited with his stock of patience getting to be less and less every moment, now rose, and with his honest face somewhat pale and of an uneasy expression, proceeded to take a share in the debate. It was noticed that on his rising, the few who had appeared so unmindful of what was going on, looked marvellously attentive; and the others, as if curious to know what one so well esteemed had to say on the matter, were no less careful listeners.

"I pray you, lose not the precious time in such idle stuff as this," exclaimed he. "We want your wisest counsel. We are threatened with such calamity as is enough at the mere thought of it, to strike us dead with fear. We cannot thrust it aside. It hath come upon us unprepared. All that can be done is to endeavour to keep the mischief in as narrow a compass as may be possible. Up and be doing, then, my masters, without a moment's delaying, for the negligence of one may be the destruction of all."

At the hearing of this discourse, so different from what all, excepting the anxious few, expected, the greater number stared in absolute astonishment, and the rest waited as if in expectation of hearing what was to follow.

"My friends!" continued the speaker, in a low, thick voice, as if he could scarce speak, "*The plague is in Stratford!*"

"The plague?" exclaimed many in the same moment of time, leaning forward from their seats, breathless with horror and surprise.

"I would to God there could be a doubt of it!" replied John Shakspeare. "My worthy and approved good friend, Master Combe, of whose honourableness there can be none here present who have not had excellent evidence, hath, in one of the manifold generous offices he is ever intent upon doing to his poorer neighbours, made this doleful discovery; and with the advice of divers of the most experienced of my fellow burgesses, who alone knew of it from me, I have had you here assembled, that you might learn from him the exact truth, and then consider amongst yourselves which be the fittest way of providing for the common safety."

At this there was a dead silence; and when Master Combe stood up, every eye was strained to scrutinize him, and every ear stretched forward to hear the most distinctly the promised communication.

"I pray you, my worthy neighbours and friends, fear nothing!" exclaimed John a Combe, "fear will only make you the victim of what you dread; but courage and good conduct will help you to drive the pestilence from your door. That it doth exist amongst us, I would I could doubt; and this is how I came at the knowledge of it. Hearing that there was a poor family visited with a sudden sickness, of which some were like to die had they not help presently, I speeded thither with what medicines I usually carry on such occasions, knowing them to be of especial benefit in divers disorders. In a low cottage, ruinous, and exceeding dirty, I came upon the sufferers. As God me save, I there saw a sight such as I have not seen in my whole life before; and trust in Jesu never to see again. I entered at the kitchen, where, in one corner, on a litter of rushes, I beheld one dead—the father of this wretched family—and, by his side, his wife in the last agonies; the fixed stare of whose yellow eyeballs settling into death, I saw, at a glance, made all help of medicine out of the case. A babe was crawling on the floor towards her; but it had a sickly look with it that was ghastly to see. In another corner was a young girl dead also, her fair face getting to be discoloured and unsightly; and in a chair was a boy who, by his dress, I knew was used to labour in the fields, and he complained he felt so deadly bad he could not return to his work. I went into another chamber, where was the old grannam, lying upon a truckle bed, moaning terribly, but saying nought; and doubled up at her feet was the figure of another ancient dame, who had been her nurse till she dropped were she was, and could not be got to move hand or foot. I was informed, by a charitable neighbour who came in with me, that this illness had only appeared amongst them since the preceding night, soon after unpacking of a parcel they had received by the carrier from some friends in

London. On hearing this I had a sudden misgiving, for I had received certain intelligence the day previous, that the pestilence had broke out there. My heart was too full to speak; and when I was further told, that in addition to the inmates of the cottage, sundry of the neighbours who had called in, hearing of their sickness, had been taken with a like disorder, one of whom had given up the ghost not half an hour since, my suspicion took firmer ground. Presently I examined one of the dead. My fears then received terrible confirmation. The plague spot was upon him. Having given such orders as I thought necessary, without exciting any alarm, I fumigated myself well, and acquainted my good friend, John Shakspeare, with the fearful truth, and by his advice you have been called here to take instant measures to prevent the spreading of this direful calamity. In whatsoever thing I may be of service at this unhappy time, I pray you use me as one friend would use another. Believe me, I will do it lovingly, whatever may be required."

Though the speaker concluded what he had to say, for some moment's space none sought to interrupt the awful silence which followed; but sat like so many statues of fear, with eyes almost starting from their sockets, mouths partly open, and big drops of perspiration standing upon their wrinkled foreheads. Of the most terrified was the little lawyer upon the stool, who, leaning his elbows on the table, and with his pointed chin resting upon his palms, kept his sharp eyes fixed upon John a Combe, looking more frightened as the other proceeded in his narration, till he gave voice to his consternation in an audible groan. Presently, some began to turn their gaze from Master Combe to each other, and finding in every face the horror so visible in their own, they remained stupified and bewildered, till one nigh unto the door rushed out, and with the look of one struck with a sudden frenzy, ran home, shouting at the top of his voice, "The plague! the plague!" and many others of that assembly, put out of all discretion by the greatness of their fear, made from the place with as much speed of foot as they could use, in the hope of securing the safety of themselves and families. They that were left then proceeded to take counsel among themselves what was fittest to be done; and Master Combe being invited by them to assist in their deliberations, did give such excellent advice, that it was agreed to by all, with wonderful admiration of his wisdom and greatness of heart; and they sat for several hours making resolutions in accordance with what he had proposed.

"I cannot hear of a denial," said Master Combe to John Shakspeare, as they were returning together from the hall. "This can now be no proper place for your sweet wife and her young son, or any of her family. Stay they here, it must be at the hazard of their lives, for none can say who shall escape; whilst if they seek refuge in my poor dwelling till the danger hath passed, they need have communication with none, and so shall be in no peril."

"In honest truth I like it well, Master Combe, and am much beholden to you for your friendly care," replied his companion. "Yet am I fearful of accepting of your courtesy, thinking it may put you to inconvenience, and to some danger also."

"Speak not of it, an' you love me," said the other, with a very sincere earnestness; "it is at your entire disposal, as long as it may be at your need. As for myself, *this* is my place. Whilst so many of my neighbours are in such imminent peril, here will I remain to do them whatever office may be expedient for their good."

"An' if it please you, worthy sir, I will assist you with what humble ability I have," added John Shakspeare; "I will take order that my dame and her babe proceed forthwith, with their attendants, to the security provided for them; for which sweet kindness I and mine shall feel bound to you ever after, and will make provision for her having all things necessary; and then I will hold myself in readiness to do whatsoever you shall think fittest."

"I would accept of no help in this matter sooner than your own," answered Master Combe; "knowing your thorough honesty and well disposedness, as I do; yet, methinks, you shall find sufficient in this strait to watch over the safety of those dearest to you, and cannot advisedly, when they are looking to you for help, put your life in jeopardy for the security of others."

"Nay, by your leave, Master Combe, though I am no scholar, I cannot allow of that," exclaimed John Shakspeare, with some eagerness; "methinks my duty to my neighbours calleth me to their assistance when they shall require it of me, quite as loudly as it may yourself."

"But forget you how many are dependant on your exertions for an honest living, which is not my case," answered his companion.

"I will see to their safety, and I will look with as much care as I may to my own," said the other earnestly; "but, in mine own opinion, I should be deserving of the good-will of none, were I to slink away when danger was at the heels of my friends, and leave them to stand it as they might, whilst I cared only for the safety of myself and what belonged to me."

"Your hand, honest John Shakspeare!" cried Master Combe, shaking his friend's hand very heartily in his own. "Believe me, I love you all the better for having such notions. But I must down this lane," continued he, as they stood together at the corner; "I beseech you hasten your sweet wife as much as you can, that she may out of the town with as little delaying as need be at such a time, and I will with all convenient speed to my house to prepare for her reception. A fair good night to you, neighbour."

"God speed you, worthy sir, in all you do!" exclaimed the other, with the same friendly feeling, as Master Combe proceeded on his way. "There wends as good a man as ever broke bread!" continued he, when the object of his praise was out of hearing; and he stood where he was for some minutes, leaning on his staff, with his honest heart full of admiration, watching the progress of his companion, till a turning of the lane hid him from his view. It was now just upon twilight, and the lane being bordered by tall trees, closely planted, and in their fullest foliage, a great portion of it was in deep shadow; but this seemed only to make more fresh and vivid the high bank on the other side, which led up into a corn-field, whereof the rich yellow ears, and the crimson poppies blushing beneath them, as seen in every gap of the hedge, gave promise of abundant harvest; and the hedge being of elder, in great patches of blossom, looked at a distance like unto pure white linen a drying on the green branches. John a Combe, as he walked along, noticing the quick movements of the bats, whirling here and there in quest of such insects as formed their victual, on a sudden had his eye attracted by a gleam of light on the opposite bank, which at first he took to be a glow-worm, but the next moment distinguished a large black mass moving in the deep shadow; the which he had scarce made out to be the figure of a man, when two men, armed and masked, rushed upon him from that very spot. As quick as lightning his rapier was out, and he on his defence. A muttered execration was all he heard, as they came upon him both at once, in such a sort as proved they would have his life if they could. John a Combe was on the brink of a dry ditch, and within a few yards of a gate leading to the corn-field, over against which was an opening in the trees, that gave a fair light to see all around; and for this he made, defending himself the whilst so briskly that neither of his opponents could get him at an advantage. Here having got himself without hurt of any kind, he put his back to the gate, and now seeing that he had before him two stout varlets in masks, who pressed on him as though they would not be baffled in their aims, he presently put forth what cunning of fence he had, and so nimble was his steel, and so quick his movements, that he avoided every thrust. This, however, only seemed to make them the more savage and desperate, and they pressed closer upon him. What might have been the end on't had things gone on, I cannot take on me to determine; but the conflict was stopped much sooner than was expected of any, for one of the two was felled to the earth from an unseen hand, and the other varlet at the same moment got such a thrust in his wrist, as made him incapable of any mischief.

"Lie there, caitiff! exclaimed John Shakspeare, who, loitering at the top of the lane, had heard the clash of the weapons, and hastening to the spot, had come in time to deal a blow with his staff that rid his friend of the fiercest of his assailants. "Lie there, for a pitiful coward and a knave to boot. I doubt not hanging be too good for thee, thou murderous villain, to seek the life of one of so excellent a nature. But thou hast not done amiss in hiding of thy face, for I warrant we shall find rascal writ in every line of it. As I live, Master Buzzard!" cried he in some surprise, as he took off the mask of him he had knocked down.

"And here have we no bigger a villain to help him than his man Saul!" exclaimed John a Combe, as he tore off the visor of the other. Master Buzzard came to himself presently, for he was but little hurt, and finding he had been so completely baffled, he said never a word. As soon as he regained his footing, with a look of devilish malignity he took himself off, leaving his man to follow as he best might. Neither received hindrance from Master Combe or his trusty friend—who were in truth monstrous glad to be rid of the company of such thorough paced villains.

CHAPTER IV.

And what's a life? A weary pilgrimage
Whose glory in one day doth fill the stage
With childhood, manhood, and decrepit age.
And what's a life? The flourishing array
Of the proud summer meadow, which, to-day,
Wears her green plush, and is to-morrow—hay.

QUARLES.

How now! Ah me!
God and all saints be good to us!

BEN JONSON.

Death may usurp on nature many hours,
And yet the fire of life kindle again
The overpressed spirits.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE house of John a Combe, so handsomely offered by him for the reception of Dame Shakspeare and her infant son, lay about a mile from Stratford, the nighest way across the fields; and had been built some twenty years in a famous quaint pretty style, with projecting gables, curiously formed and carved; a latticed porch, whereon all manner of delicate flowers were climbing very daintily, and it was enclosed with its garden in a high wall that had iron gates, in an archway in front, from which a broad path led on each side of a well kept lawn right up to the house.

Dame Shakspeare had a famous fire of good logs burning in her chamber, the light whereof shewed the goodly hangings of the bed, and rich arras brought from beyond seas that were about the wainscot, with all the store of needful furniture in high presses, cupboards, chairs, tables, and the like, exquisitely carved in choice woods that stood around her on every side. The good dame, clad in a simple long garment of linen that wrapt her all around, sat at some short distance from the fire dogs, knitting of a pair of hose, whilst over against her sat nurse Cicely, with the babe in her lap—the front of his white frock hid under a dowlas cloth, that was carefully tucked under his chin—feeding him with a pap spoon. Nurse talked on without ceasing, gossipping to the mother, and prattling to the babe, all in a breath: but Dame Shakspeare scarce spoke a word. Indeed, her thoughts were in a strange misgiving humour, fearing for the present, and doubting of the future, till her eye would light on her sweet son; and then noticing of his exceeding happiness at what he was about, her aspect would catch a sudden brightness, and mayhap she would say something, as if there was nought to trouble her.

"Of those who are dead some say there is no knowing for the number," continued nurse. "They die out of all calculation; not here and there one, as in honest fashion they should, but everywhere scores. Humphrey heard, at the gate, of Oliver Dumps, that they went so fast, it was supposed there would soon be none left to tend the sick. Ods lifelings, what an appetite thou hast!" added she, as she kept feeding of the child. "Beshrew my heart, but thou would'st eat up house and home kept thou this fashion at all times. Well, it's all one. They that are dead cannot help themselves; and for the living they must trust in God's mercy. How now, chuck? What more! Well, heaven send thee good store of victuals! By my troth, methinks Master Combe shall deserve well of us all our days. As for myself, I would I could know the service I might do his worship, I would not spare my old bones, I promise you. He hath been a mean for the preserving of our lives, that be a sure thing; for it standeth to reason, had we remained in the town, we should have been no better than loathsome corpses long since."

Dame Shakspeare replied not; but her nature was too forcibly impressed with the load of obligation she lay under, not to assent to all her attendant would express on that point.

"And thou hast especial reason to be thankful to him, my young master," continued the old woman, to her charge; "by'r lady, thou hadst best make haste to be a man, and shew his worship how grateful of heart thou art for his goodness. And then to put us all in so delectable a place as this," added she, looking round the chamber in evident admiration. "O' my life, 'tis a house fit for a prince, and it hath in it every thing that heart could desire. This is his worship's own bed-chamber as I have heard. Happy the woman who shall have the owning of it, say I! I protest when I hear how nobly he hath borne himself throughout the dreadful raging of this doleful pestilence, I am clean lost in wonder and astonishment at his infinite goodness."

"Surely, nurse, it must be somewhat beyond the time they usually come?" here exclaimed Dame Shakspeare; "I hope nought amiss hath happened to either, and yet I fear. Alack, it would go hard with me were I to lose my husband; and Master Combe hath shewed himself so true a friend I could not but grieve at his loss. I pray God, very heartily, both are safe."

"Amen!" said the nurse, very devoutly. "But keep up a good heart, I pray you, mistress. I would wager my life on't no harm shall happen to them. They must needs be much too useful to be spared when such pitiful work is going forward. But concerning of the time of their usual coming, I cannot think it hath yet arrived, though mayhap it shall be found to be no great way off. Peradventure, rest you patient awhile, you shall hear Humphrey give us note of their approach before long. Ha! my young rogue!" continued she, addressing the babe, and fondling him very prettily, upon finding he would take no more of her food. "I warrant me now thou hast had a famous meal! Art not ashamed to devour such monstrous quantities, when victual is so scarce to be had? O' my conscience, he laugheth in my very face! By your patience, mistress, this son of yours is no other than a very horrible young reprobate, for he seemeth to care for nought when he hath all that he standeth in need of."

"Bless his dear heart!" cried the much-delighted mother, rousing up from her melancholy at sight of her babe's enjoyment. "It glads me more than I can speak, to see him looking so hearty, and in so rare a humour. But I must to the casement, I am impatient of this seeming long delay; and so saying, she suddenly rose from her seat, and made for the window—a broad casement which looked out over the porch, for the chamber was above the ground-floor, and opening it, she leaned out to watch for her husband. The night had set in, though it was scarce eight of the clock, but being the latter end of October that was no marvel. Dark clouds were floating heavily in the sky, and the trees, though half denuded of their foliage, made a famous rustling as the wind came sweeping among their branches. Every thing looked indistinct and shadowy within the range of sight, and beyond, all seemed as though closely wrapt up in a shroud. Certes, to one of Dame Shakspeare's disposition, the prospect around must have appeared wonderful melancholy, and it gave a chill to her heart that filled her with monstrous disquietude. All was in perfect silence and solitude, save down below, where Humphrey, armed with a rusty harquebus, was marching to and fro within the gate, of which station he was exceeding proud, as was manifest; for, immediately he caught sight of his mistress at the casement, he held his piece firm to his side, made himself look as tall as he might, and with a terrible valorous countenance, as he supposed, continued to walk backwards and forwards at his post.

"Hast seen anything, Humphrey?" enquired Dame Shakspeare.

"Yes, mistress, an' it please you," replied he, stopping short in his walk, and holding of himself as upright as any dart. "I have seen old Gammer Lambswool's two sandy coloured pigs making for home with all the speed of foot they were master of."

"Psha! hast seen any thing of thy master?" added the good dame.

"No, mistress!" answered he.

"Hast seen ought of Master Combe?"

"No, mistress."

Hearing no further questioning, Humphrey continued his marching; and his mistress, in no way satisfied with his intelligence, remained at the casement silent and abstracted. She could hear nurse Cicely walking up and down the chamber, evidently, by her speech and occasional humming, striving to get the boy into a sleep. Presently, in a shrill trembling voice, yet not without some spice of tune in it, the old woman commenced singing of the following words:—

NURSE CICELY'S LULLABY.

"Hush thee, sweet babe! Eve's curtains o'er us hover,
In tuneless lullabies low moans the wind;
And the tired day (hid in his cloak's dark cover)
Pillowed on Earth's green lap hath now reclined.
Hush thee, sweet babe!

Silent since noon hath been the joyful hymning,
  Which, since the blushing morn, thrill'd all the air;
In the clear stream no unseen hand is limning
  Delicate blossoms coyly glancing there.
    Hush thee, sweet babe!

Lo! to invite thee to the land of slumber
  The choicest beauties of the daintiest bowers
Call to the lovingest of all their number—
  'Close thy fair eyes and join thy sister flowers.'
    Hush thee, sweet babe!"

These verses sounded more like unto the song of some fairy than an old nurse's ditty, as Dame Shakspeare thought; but there was no denying it was of the old woman's singing.

"Well, never saw I the like!" exclaimed Cicely, in tones of such monstrous astonishment as drew the mother's attention in an instant. "Instead of getting into a good sound sleep as I was assured thou hadst fallen into, I know not how long since, here art thou as wide awake as am I, and listening to my poor singing with a look as if thy very heart was in it." Certes, it was as the nurse had said. The babe lay in her arms, seeming in such strange wonder and delight as surely no babe ever shewed before. Even Dame Shakspeare marvelled somewhat to note the amazed smiling aspect of her young son.

"By my fay!" continued the old woman, "If this babe come not to be some great master of music I am hugely mistaken in him. I remember me now, this is the first time I have chanced to sing in his hearing. Marry, an' if his worship be so taken with my music, I warrant me he shall have a rare plenty of it, for I have as famous a store of ballads as any woman in Warwickshire."

"I doubt not they will be well liked of him, judging of the manner he hath taken the first he hath heard," observed his mother.

At this moment there was heard such horrible unnatural screaming and strange uproar, that made Dame Shakspeare, more full of misgiving than ever, rush back to the casement with as much speed as she could use. The first object that met her eye was no other than Humphrey, half lying on the ground, supporting himself with one arm and one leg doubled under him, and with the other hand holding in his trembling grasp the harquebus he made so brave a shew with a few minutes since. He was shaking in every limb; his hat had fallen off, leaving his face the more visible, which bore an aspect of the completest fright ever seen. His eyes were starting forward, his cheeks pale, and his mouth half open, one jaw knocking against the other as hard as they could. Turning her gaze in the direction in which the boy was staring, as if incapable of moving away his eyes, though for a single instant, she saw a sight the horribleness of which made her scream outright. It was a spectral figure at the gate, with long bare arms and legs, all livid and ghastly, and a face that seemed more terrible to look on than death itself. The pestilence in its worst stage was apparent in every feature; and the glaring eye, blue skin, gaunt jaws, and ragged beard, were more distinguishable for the sheet in which the head and part of the body were wrapped. He shook the iron bars of the gate as if he would have them down, and tried to climb them, all the whilst giving out such piercing shricks as made the blood run cold to hear.

"Jesu preserve the child!" exclaimed the terrified mother.

"Flames and the rack!" shouted a hollow sepulchral voice, as he shook the iron bars again and again. "Hell rages in my every vein! Fires eat into my heart! O mercy!" Then arose another scream more wild and piercing than any that had preceded it, and the poor wretch flung his head about, and twisted his limbs as if in the horriblest torture.

"Drive him away, good Humphrey!" cried Dame Shakspeare, the sense of her child's danger overcoming all other feelings in her.

"Ye—ye—ye—yes, mistress!" answered Humphrey as plainly as his fright would allow him, but moved he never an inch.

"Oh, the good God!" shrieked the diseased man in his frenzy. "Oh, the Infinite Great One! This is the day of doom! Hide—hide, ye wicked!—the ministers of judgment compass ye all about. There is no 'scape from the consuming fire. It scorches my flesh—it burneth my bones to ashes. Ah!" and again the same horrible yell pierced the air as he writhed under his pains.

"Humphrey, I say, drive him away, I prythee!" cried the frightened mother more earnestly than at first. "Alack! if he should break in now we are clean lost!"

"Ye—ye—yes, mistress!" muttered Humphrey, but he sought not to move either his eyes from the man, or his limbs from the ground. However, it did so fall out that the terrible cause of all their fear, after spending of his strength in vainly essaying to shake down the gates, screaming and calling after the fashion that hath been told, in the height of his frenzy fell from the place he had climbed to down to the hard ground within the walls, where, after twisting himself about for some few seconds in the horriblest contortions, and shrieking as if in the last agonies, he finally lay stiff, silent, and manifestly dead.

"Humphrey! Humphrey! get you in doors this instant!" exclaimed his mistress in a manner as though she scarce knew what she said. Then wringing of her hands exceeding pitifully exclaimed in a lower voice, "Woe is me! the plague will be upon us, and no remedy."

Dame Shakspeare had called to Humphrey many times, and though he answered her at first, he paid but small attention to her commands, but when the frightful object got within the walls, he did nought but keep regarding of his motions with an uneasy stare, as if his wits had clean gone; and now his mistress again called to him, he moved not, nor spoke a word, nor gave any sign, save the loud chattering of his teeth, that he was one of the living. Presently there was heard the sound as of sundry persons running, and ere any very long time there appeared at the gate divers of the town watch and others, with torches and lanthorns, armed with long staves and other weapons.

"Get you in, dame, I pray you, and shut to the casement," cried Master Combe from among them.

"In with you, in God's name, or you are lost!" almost at the same moment of time shouted John Shakspeare; and his wife, with a hurried ejaculation of her great comfort at hearing of their voices, did as she was bid, and sunk into a chair more dead than alive.

"I would rather have given a thousand pounds than he should have escaped," said Master Combe. "I pray God no harm come of it to your sweet wife and children."

"I cannot help but fear, the peril is so great," replied John Shakspeare in a somewhat desponding tone.

"Lord ha' mercy upon us!" muttered a voice not far off of them.

"As I live, 'tis my knave Humphrey!" exclaimed his master, looking through the bars of the gate. "Why how now! what art doing there? Get thee in by the back way on the instant, and stir not till we are gone."

"La! what be that you, master, indeed?" cried out Humphrey with a sort of foolish joy, as he recognised the voice.

"Get thee in, I tell thee!" replied the other sharply, and Humphrey not caring to take another look at the dead man, walked himself off, and soon disappeared behind the house; whereupon his master with a key he had, opened the gate, and by the directions of Master Combe, the corpse was presently placed upon a hand-barrow, and carried away by the watchmen; then a fire of dry sticks was made on the spot where it had fallen, in which certain aromatics were flung, which made a cloud of smoke that filled the air all round about for a great space. After it had burned some time, John Shakspeare called to his wife that she might ope the casement, and she waited no second calling. Then passed they nigh upon an hour in very comfortable discourse one with another, as if it was a customary thing of them, she leaning out of the chamber, and her husband and worthy Master Combe standing upon the lawn beneath, close wrapped up in long cloaks, and carrying lighted torches in their hands.

"I cannot express to you how glad I am to hear of the abating of the pestilence," said dame Shakspeare. "'Tis the pleasantest news I have heard this many a day. But think you it may be relied on?"

"I have taken the very surest means of proving its perfect credibleness," answered Master Combe.

"Not so many have died of it to-day by twenty as died yesterday," added her husband; "and yesterday we buried ten less than the day before."

"I am infinitely thankful!" exclaimed she in a famous cheerfulness. "I heartily pray it may continue so."

"So do we all, sweet dame," answered Master Combe. "And I have good assurance, now we are blessed with the prayers of one so worthy, we cannot help but speed in our endeavours. But the night wears on apace. I pray you pardon me for hurrying away your husband. O' my life I would not do it only we have that to look to this night, which cannot be done without him."

"Ay, dame, we must be going," added her husband. "So a good sweet rest to thee, and kiss my boy lovingly for me, I prythee."

"That will I, dear heart, without fail," answered she. "And a fair good night to you both, and may God above preserve you in all perils."

"Good night, sweet dame, and infinite thanks for your kind wishes," said Master Combe; and then he and his associate left the house, locking the gates after them; and proceeded straight to the town.

Now was there a wonderful difference in this town of Stratford to what it had been only a few months since, when I sought the picturing of it; for in place of all the pleasant riot of children and general gossipping of neighbours, all was dumb as a churchyard; save at intervals, the wail of the sorrowful or the shriek of the dying disturbed the awful stillness. Scarce a living creature was to be seen excepting the watchman keeping guard, to whom divers of the unhappy burgesses would talk to out of their windows, enquiring who of their friends were yet spared, or one or two having been close prisoners in their own houses would creep stealthily along the street to breathe the fresher air, looking about them suspiciously and in great dread, and ready to fly at any unusual sound; and instead of the sun throwing its warm beams upon the house-tops and other open places, there was a sullen darkness every where about, except just where one carried a torch or a lanthorn with him which made a faint red light thereabouts, or when the moon burst out of the deep black clouds, and disclosed to view the deserted streets grown over with patches of rank grass; the melancholy houses,—many untenanted because of the pestilence having spared none there,—divers with a red cross upon their doors in evidence that the plague had there found a victim, and the rest with doors and windows carefully barred and lights streaming through the closed shutters—a glad sign that there at least none had yet fallen.

John Shakspeare and Master Combe, closely wrapped in their cloaks, entered the principal street just as the moon made a clear path for herself in the sky, and threw such a light as made them distinguish objects for the time almost as well as in broad day. The first person they met was no other than Oliver Dumps, armed with a bill, and wearing a face so woe-begone as was pitiful to look on.

"Well, Oliver, what news?" enquired Master Combe.

"News!" exclaimed the constable in his dolefullest manner. "Prythee what news canst expect to hear at such a miserable time? As I am a Christian man, and a sinful, I am nigh wore out with melancholy. What a world is this! Alack, what will become of us? I see no end to the evil whereof this town is so full. We are all villany—very villany, as I am a Christian man."

"Why, what hath happened, good Oliver?" asked John Shakspeare.

"Wickedness hath happened," replied Oliver Dumps: "the very shamefullest wickedness ever I came anigh. Well may we be visited by plagues. Our natures are vile. We run after iniquity as a curtail dog runs i' the wheel." Then, being further pressed by

Master Combe to come to the point, he added, "First, there is Sir Nathaniel, who will not be moved to do any good office for the sick; and Master Buzzard, who, setteth his dogs at me, should I venture to ask of him to assist his poor neighbours. Then Stripes is ever getting of money from a parcel of ignorant, wretched folk, to conjure the pestilence away from their houses; added to which, no longer ago than scarce the half of an hour, I came upon Simon Lumpfish and Jonathan Swiggle, two of the town watch, in the kitchen of an empty dwelling, making use of a barrel of strong beer without any colour of warrant, by each laying of his length on the floor, and putting of his mouth to the bung-hole."

"They shall be looked to," observed Master Combe; "But come you with us, good Oliver, perchance we may need your assistance." Then, turning to one of the watch, who was stationed at a door-way, he enquired how things went in his ward.

"One hath died within this hour over at Peter Gimblet's, an' it please your worship," answered the man respectfully: "and there are two sick here at Dame Holloway's. They do say Morris Greenfinch be like to recover; and in some houses hereabouts, where the plague hath been, they have taken it so kindly that it hath scarce been felt."

After bidding of him keep strict watch, they continued their walk; and presently heard a voice of one calling across the way to his neighbour opposite.

"How goeth all with you?"

"We are all well, thanks be to God! neighbour Malmsey; and how fareth your bed-fellow?" replied one from a casement over against him.

"Bravely, neighbour Dowlas, I thank you," said his brother alderman; "they do say there is some show of the pestilence abating; I would it were true, else shall we be all ruined for a surety. I have not so much as sold a pint of wine for the last week past."

"Nor I a yard of cloth, for a month," added the other. "I pray God, the survivors may have the decency to go into mourning for their lost relations."

"And so your good dame is well, neighbour?" asked Alderman Malmsey.

"As well as heart could wish," replied Alderman Dowlas.

"Commend me to her, I pray you," said the other; and then, with a "good night," each closed his casement. Upon proceeding a little further on, the party were stopped by the melodious sweet sound of several voices, intent upon the singing of some holy hymn. Perchance, it might have proceeded from some pious family; for in the quiet night, the ear could plainly enough distinguish the full deep bass of the father, joining with the clear sweet trebles of his wife and children. And exceeding touching it was at such a time to hear such proper singing; indeed, so moved were the three listeners, that they sought not to leave the spot till it was ended.

"That be David Hurdle's voice, I will be bound for it," exclaimed the Constable. "Indeed, it be well known he hath, during the raging of the pestilence, spent best part of the day in praying with his family, and in the singing of godly hymns. He is a poor man—some call him a Puritan, but I do believe him to be as honest good Christian man as any in this town, be they rich or poor, gentle or simple. But what villanous rude uproar is this, my masters! that treadeth so close on the heels of such exquisite music?"

I'faith, Oliver Dumps had good cause to cry out as he did; for all at once, they were startled by a number of most unmannerly voices, shouting in very boisterous fashion such profane words as these:—

" If we boast not a fire,
That is just our desire—
What then? We must needs burn the bellows;
And if here there's a man
That hath nought in his can—
What then? He's the prince of good fellows."

"Odds, my life!" exclaimed a voice that was heard, amid the din of laughing and shouting, and other lewd behaviour. "Odds, my life, that is as exquisite a catch as ever I heard. Methinks, 'tis the very movingest, mirthfullest a———. What sayest Ticklebreech?"

"Exactly so, an' it please your reverence," replied the voice of the schoolmaster, in a tone somewhat husky.

"By'r lady, master parson," said another, "methinks 'tis of that superlative exquisiteness 't would tickle—(a hiccup) the ribs of a tombstone."

Master Combe and his companions peeped through the crevices of the shutters, and beheld Sir Nathaniel seated at the head of a table covered with drinking vessels, with Stripes opposite him, and nigh upon a score of low idle disorderly vagabonds sitting round making merry, but with monstrous little assurance of sobriety in their looks.

"Lord! Lord! an' these fellows be not heathens, I marvel what they shall rightly be called," said the scandalized constable.

"It grieves me to see Sir Nathaniel so readily accommodate himself to such discreditableness," observed John Shakspeare.

"'Slight!" exclaimed Master Combe, whose nature was vexed to behold such a scene with such actors in it; "he is a very hog, that will swill any wash that is given him, let it be where it may."

The ringing of a large hand-bell now attracted their attention elsewhere; and looking along the street, they observed a cart slowly proceeding towards them, accompanied by two or three stout fellows, some carrying torches, and others armed with bills. It stopped at a house where was a red cross on the door, at which having knocked, and the door opening, two stepped in, and presently returned, bearing of a heavy burthen betwixt them, with the which they ascended a short ladder, and, without any word spoke, cast into the cart. Then, ringing of the bell again they continued their way, till some door opening noiselessly, they stopped, entered, and with the same dreadful silence carried out, what on nearer approach proved to be a corpse, which was added to the rest they had, in the manner that hath been described.

"Hast taken many this round?" asked Master Combe, of one of the watchmen walking in front of the horse.

"No, your worship, God be thanked," replied the man.

"Hast many more to take?" asked John Shakspeare.

"I expect not, master," said the other. "Indeed, from all I have witnessed and can get knowledge of, it seemeth to me the pestilence be abating wonderfully."

"God send it may come to a speedy ending," exclaimed Oliver Dumps, with some earnestness; "It maketh me clean out at heart when I think of what ravage it hath made."

The three now walked at the horse's head, conversing concerning of who had died, and who were sick, and the like matters, stopping when the cart stopped, and going on when it proceeded; but always keeping before the horse, because of the wind blowing from that direction. At one house, the men remained longer than was usual, and the door being open, there was heard a great cry of lamentation as of a woman in terrible affliction.

"Ah, poor dame, she hath infinite cause for such deep grieving," said the constable.

"Go, get you hence!" cried one very urgently from within the house. "As God shall judge me, he shall not be touched."

"What meaneth this?" enquired John Shakspeare.

"I say it shall not be," continued the same voice. "I will die ere I will let him be borne away from me. Hast hearts? Hast feelings? Dost know of what stuff a mother's love be made? Away, villains!"

"'Tis a most pitiful story," observed Master Combe. "Wondrous pitiful! In sooth, she hath been sorely tried. But I must in, else in her desperation she will allow of nothing; and mayhap they may be violent with her."

"What wouldst do?" enquired John Shakspeare, catching his friend by the arm, as he was making for the door. "Surely, if there is one dead here, you will only be endangering of yourself by venturing in, and no good come of it to any."

"I pray you think not of it," cried Oliver Dumps, seeming in a famous consternation. "There hath more died in that house than in any two in the town."

"Fear nothing; I will be back anon," said Master Combe, as he broke away, and entered at the open door.

"Alack, think not of following him, I pray you, John Shakspeare!" called out the constable, in increased alarm, as he beheld the one quickly treading upon the heels of the other. "Well, never saw I such wanton seeking of death. They be lost men. 'Twill be dangerous to be in their company after this; so I'll e'en have none on't." And away started he in the direction of his home. In the mean while the other two reached an inner chamber, where was a sight to see that would have melted any stone. On a low bed there sat a matronly woman, of decent appearance, with an aspect pale and exceeding care-worn, and her eyes full of such thorough anguish as is utterly impossible to be described; and she held, folded in her arms, the body of a youth seeming to be dead of the pestilence.

"The last!" exclaimed she, in most moving tones, as she fixed her tearful gaze on the discoloured object in her lap. "Husband—children—all gone, despite my tender nursing, and constant hope this one might be spared, and now that—each followed the other, and here am I—woe is me!—widowed, childless, and heart-broken. Alack, 'tis a cruel world!" And thereupon she sobbed in such a sort as could not be seen of any with dry eyes.

"But they shall never take thee from me, my dear boy," continued she, in the like pitiful manner. "Heretofore I have borne all and flinched none; but thou hast been my last stay, whereon all the love I bore thy good father and thy brave brothers, was heaped together; and losing thee, I lose my very heart and soul: so, quick or dead, I will cling to thee whilst I have life. Away! insatiate wretches!" she cried, turning her mournful aspect upon the two men, "Hast not had enough of me? Dost not see how poor a case I am in for the lack of what I have been used to? Begone!" And then she hugged the lifeless youth in her arms as if she would part with him on no account. Neither Master Combe nor John Shakspeare felt as they were complete masters of themselves; but they knew it could not be proper that the dead should stay with the living.

"Believe me, we sympathise in your great afflictions with all our hearts, good dame," at last observed the former to her, with that sweet courteousness which was so natural to him. "But I pray you, have some pity on yourself, and be resigned to that which cannot be helped!"

"Ah, Master Combe," cried she, now first observing him, "I would I could say I am glad to see you, for, in truth, you have been an excellent good friend to me and mine in our greatest need; but as it seemeth to me my heart's strings be so upon the stretch, 'twould be but a mockery to say so. Oh, the misery!" and then she bowed her head and wept exceedingly. At this Master Combe endeavoured all he could to give her comfort; and as his speech was wonderfully to the purpose, though at first she was deaf to all argument of the sort, by degrees he won her to some shew of reason.

"But he shall not be touched!" she exclaimed, mournfully, yet determinedly, "who so proper to carry him out of the world as she who brought him in it? I will have no rude hand laid on his delicate limbs. I will to the grave with him myself. Alack! poor boy, how my heart aches to look at thee!" Then carefully wiping off the tears she had let fall upon his face, she proceeded to wrap him in a sheet, ever and anon giving of such deep sobs as shewed in what extremity she was in. This Master Combe sought not to interrupt; and John Shakspeare's honest nature was so moved at the scene, he had no mind to utter a word. Even the men, used as they must have been to sights of wretchedness, regarded not what was going on in total indifferency, as was manifest in their aspects. But the movingest sight of all was to see that hapless mother, when she had disposed of her dead son as decently as she could, bearing the heavy burthen in her arms with a slow step, looking as pale as any ghost, and in such terrible despair as can never be conceived. The men, as they led the way with a lanthorn, were forced, more than once, to draw the cuffs of their jerkins over their eyelids; and Master Combe and John Shakspeare followed her, full of pity for her sorrowful condition. She bore up bravely till she came to the door, when the sight of the dead cart, made visible by the red glare of the torches, came upon her with such a suddenness, that she swooned away, and would have fallen on the ground, had not Master Combe ran quickly and caught her in his arms. Then, by his direction, her dead son was placed with the other corpses, and she carried back to the room she had left; and after seeing she had proper attendance, he and John Shakspeare proceeded with the watchmen and others that had the care of the cart, calling no where else as they went, in so doleful a humour that they spoke never a word all the way. They came to a field outside of the town where was a great hole dug, and a large mound of fresh earth at the side of it. At this time, some of the men took in their hands mattocks which were stuck in the soil, others backed the cart so that the end of it should come as nigh as possible to the pit, and the rest held torches that the others might see the better. Scarce any spoke save Master Combe, who, in a low tone, gave such orders as were needed. Presently the cart was tilted, and in the next moment the bodies of those dead of the pestilence swept into the rude grave prepared for them.

"By God's body, I heard a groan!" cried John Shakspeare, with a famous vehemence. In an instant there was so dead a silence you might have heard a pin drop. What had been said was true enough, for ere another minute had elapsed, all there distinctly heard a sound of groaning come from the pit. Each of the men looked at his neighbour in silent terror, and speedily as they might, brought their torches to throw as much light as they could into the pit's mouth.

"Alack! I fear we have buried the living with the dead!" exclaimed Master Combe, evidently in a monstrous perplexity. Every eye was strained to note if any sign of life was visible amongst the mass below. What a sight was there presented to the horror-struck gazers! Arms and legs and upturned faces that had burst from their frail coverings, all discovered and ghastly, looking more hideous than can be conceived.

"As I live, something moveth in this corner!" cried John Shakspeare.

"A light here, ho!" shouted Master Combe in a voice that brought every torch to the spot ere the words had scarce been uttered; and all were breathless with expectation. To the extreme consternation of every one there, Master Combe suddenly seized a torch out of the hands of one of the watch who was nighest to him, and leaped in amongst those foul bodies close upon the spot pointed out by John Shakspeare.

"Help all, if ye be Christian men!" cried Master Combe, as if he was exceeding moved, whilst those above were gazing down upon him, bewildered with very fear. "Help, I pray you! for here is the widow's son alive yet, and if care be used without loss of time, perchance we shall have such good fortune as to restore him to her to be her comfort all her days."

Methinks there needs no telling of what alacrity was used to get the youth out of the pit with all speed, every one forgetting of his danger in the excitement of the case. Suffice it to say he was rescued from his expected grave before he had any consciousness of being there, and that such treatment was used as soon turned to his profit; for he recovered, and grew to be hale soon. Of the infinite joy of that late bereaved mother when that her dead son was restored alive to her loving arms, shall I not attempt to describe, for to my thinking, it is beyond the extremest cunning of the pen.

CHAPTER V.

Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee;
When thou art old there's grief enough for thee.
GREENE.

O flatterer false, thou traitor born,
What mischief more might thou devise
Than thy dear friend to have in scorn
And him to wound in sundry wise?
Which still a friend pretends to be,
And art not so by proof I see,
Fie, fie upon such treachery!
WILLIAM HUNNIS. (*Paradise of Daintie Devices.*)

Who will not judge him worthy to be robb'd
That sets his doors wide open to a thief,
And shews the felon where his treasure lies?
BEN JONSON. (*Every Man in his Humour.*)

TIME passed, and with it passed away all sign of the dreadful scourge that had fallen so heavily on the good town of Stratford. So out of mind was it, that the honest burgesses scarce ever talked of the subject, save peradventure some long winter's eve, when tales were going round the chimney corner, some one or other would vary the common gossipping of ghosts and witches, fairies and such like, with a story of the fearful plague, the which never failed to make the hearers, ere they entered their beds, down on their marrow-bones, and very heartily thank God they had escaped such imminent terrible danger. Every thing was going on just in the old pleasant way.

John Shakspeare had been made an alderman of, and was now advanced to the dignity of high bailiff, being also in a fair way of business, and in excellent repute, for his thorough honesty, among his fellow burgesses; nor was it forgotten of them the good part he played with Master Combe in the time of the pestilence. Of these, neither had suffered by the manifold dangers in which they had oft ventured; nor had Dame Shakspeare, or her family either, notwithstanding of the fright she had been put to. As for her sweet son William, he grew to be as handsome and well behaved a child as ever lived in the world, and the admiration of all who could get sight of him. Concerning of his intelligence above all other children that ever lived, nurse Cicely gave such marvellous accounts, that he must needs have been a prodigy ere he was in short coats. Be this as it may, there can be no manner of doubt he gave, at an exceeding early age, many signs of excellence, and of aptitude for such learning as the inquisitive young mind is ever most intent upon.

Once when John Shakspeare, with Humphrey and others who assisted him in his business, were labouring hard in weighing and sorting and packing certain tods of wool, the good dame was in her chamber seated, plying of her needle famously, and on the floor just at her feet was her young son, having by him certain toys such as children commonly find some pretty pastime in. Sometimes he would seem monstrous busy diverting of himself with these trifles, prattling to himself all the whilst; anon he would leave off, and lifting up his face, would ask some question of his mother, the which if she answered not, be sure he would importune her with infinite earnestness till she did. Close at hand there was a spinning-wheel; on the wainscot were two or three samplers, containing divers fine texts of scripture, with flowers worked round the border, doubtless of the good dame's own working. On a square table of oak was a basket with threads and tapes and the like in it; beside it was some cloth of a frolic green, of which she appeared to be making a new frock for the boy, with such pretty fantasy of hers in the fashioning of it, as she thought would become him most. The basement, which looked out into the garden, being unclosed, there was upon the ledge a large ewer filled with sprigs of lavender, that made the chamber smell very daintily. Nurse Cicely was assisting of Maud in a further room, the door of which being open, the two could be seen at their employment, getting up the linen of the family—for nurse had grown greatly in her mistress' confidence, because of her constant affectionateness and care of the child, and of her trustworthiness and wonderful skill in all household matters.

"Mother, I pray you tell me something concerning of the fairies of whom Nurse Cicely discourseth to me so oft!" exclaimed the boy.

"Prythee, wait till nurse hath leisure," replied his mother. "She knoweth more of them than do I."

"An' you love me, tell me are they so mindful of good little children as she hath said?" added he more urgently.

"Indeed, I have heard so," answered the dame.

"I marvel where they shall find lodging, be they of such small stature?" observed the child.

"It is said they do commonly sojourn in the cups of the sweetest flowers," said she; "hiding themselves all the day therein, in the deepest retreats of woods and lonely places; and in the night time come they out in some green field, or other verdant space, and dance merrily of a summer's eve, with such delicate sweet enjoyment as is unknown to mortals, till the morning star appeareth in the skies, when away hie they to their hiding-places, every one as swiftly as if he had wings to carry him." The boy listened with his fair eyes upturned, gazing in his mother's face in a famous seriousness and wonder, then seemed he to ponder awhile on what had been told him.

"And how may little children be possessed of such goodness as may make them be well regarded of these same fairies?" asked he at last.

"They must give way to no naughty behaviour," answered his mother. "They must not be uncivil, nor froward, nor capable of any kind of disobedience or obstinacy, nor say anything that is not true, nor be impatient, or greedy, or quarrelsome, nor have any uncleanly or untidy ways, nor do any one thing they are told not."

"I warrant you I will do none of these," exclaimed the boy.

"But above all they must be sure learn their letters betimes," continued the other; "that they may be able to know the proper knowledge writ in books, which if they know not when they grow up, neither fairy nor any other shall esteem them to be of any goodness whatsoever."

"I warrant you I will learn my letters as speedily as I can," replied the child eagerly. "Nay, I beseech you, mother, teach them to me now, for I am exceeding desirous to be thought of some goodness." The mother smiled, well pleased to notice such impatience in him, and made him leave his toys and fetch her a horn-book, that was on a shelf with a few books of another kind, the which he did very readily; and then as he stood leaning on her lap, seriously intent upon observing of the characters there put down, she told him of what names they were called, and bade him mark them well, that he might be sure not to mistake one for another. This very willingly he promised to do, and for some time, the whilst she continued her work, yet with a frequent and loving eye on his proceedings, he would pore over those letters, saying to himself what their names were, or if he stood in any doubt, straightway questioning of his mother upon the matter.

"But what good are these same letters of, mother?" enquired he all at once.

"This much," replied Dame Shakspeare, "by knowing of them thoroughly one by one, you shall soon come to be able to put them together for the forming of words; and when you are sufficiently apt at that, you shall thereby come to be learned enough to read all such words as are in any sentence—which you shall find to be made up of such; and when the reading of these sentences be familiar to you, doubt not your ability to master whatsoever proper book falleth into your hand—for all books are composed of such sentences."

"Is it so, indeed!" observed the boy in a pretty sort of innocent surprise. "And do any of these goodly books discourse of the fairies you spoke of awhile since?"

"Ah, that do they, and famously, I warrant you," answered his mother.

"Oh! how glad of heart shall I be when I can master such books!" exclaimed the child very earnestly; "for I do long to learn more of these fairies. Dost know, mother, that after nurse hath sung me songs of them, or told me marvellous pretty tales of them, as is her wont till I have fallen asleep, it hath seemed to me as if crowds of such tiny folk out of all number, shining so brightly in their gay apparel of the finest colours, as though I was with them in the fair sunshine, have come thronging to me, offering me this dainty nice thing and the other dainty nice thing, and singing to me sweeter songs than nurse Cicely sings, and dancing and making sport with such infinite joy as would make any glad to be of their company; and whilst they continue, they shew me such wonderful great kindness, and afford me such extreme pleasure, it grieveth me when I wake to find they are all gone. So that I am exceeding desirous, as I have said, to make myself as good as I can, and to learn my letters as speedily as I may, that I may be admitted to play with them, and be loved of them as much as they will let me."

The good dame marvelled somewhat to hear this, and to note with what pleased excitement it was said, for sooth to say, it was a right pleasant picture as ever limner drew, to see those intelligent eyes so full of deep expressiveness, and the fair forehead surrounded with its clustering shining curls, and the delicate rosy cheek and smiling mouth, that could of themselves have discoursed most exquisite meaning, even though that most melodious voice had failed in its proper office.

"Marry, but you have pleasant dreams, methinks!" exclaimed she at last.

"Ay, that have I," replied the boy; "yet I like not waking, and all this sweet pleasantness go away, I know not where. But I must to my lesson of the letters," added he, as he took to his horn-book again; "else shall the fairies take me to be of no manner of goodness, and straightway have none of me."

"Yes, an' it please you, mistress is within. I pray you enter," nurse Cicely was here heard to say in the next chamber—"I doubt not she will be exceeding glad of your company; so walk in, I beseech you. Here is Mistress Alderman Dowlas, an' it please you, mistress!" exclaimed she, entering the chamber, closely followed by the draper's wife, looking very cheerful, and dressed in a scarlet cloak and hat, with a basket in her hand and her purse at her girdle, as though she were going to marketing.

"Ha, gossip, how farest?" enquired the visitor, making up to her host, with a merry tripping pace.

"Bravely, neighbour, I thank you heartily," replied she, and then they two kissed each other affectionately, and nurse Cicely got a chair, and having wiped the seat with her apron, sat it down close to her mistress.

"And how's the dear boy? Come hither, you pretty rogue, I would have a kiss of you!" exclaimed the alderman's wife, as she sat herself at her ease, and gave the basket for nurse to place on the table.

"An' it please you, I am learning of my letters," said the child, shrinking closer to his mother's side.

"Nay, by my troth, this is somewhat uncivil of you!" cried the dame, though she laughed merrily all the time. "But I doubt you will use a woman so when you get to be a man."

"He will have none of his father in him an' he do," observed nurse, "for he had the wit to win one of the very comeliest women all the country round."

"La, nurse, how idly you talk!" exclaimed Dame Shakspeare, then bending her head to her young son to hide a slight blush that appeared on her fair cheeks, she said to him—"Go you to neighbour Dowlas like a good boy, I pray you."

"Ha, come hither straight, and mayhap I shall find you some keepsake ere we part," added her neighbour. The child moved slowly towards her, with his eyes steadfastly regarding of his horn-book, till she raised him on her knee and caressed him; and yet he was as intent on the letters as ever.

"And what hast got here, I prythee, that thou art so earnest about?" asked Mistress Dowlas, as she examined what he had in his hand. "A horn-book, as I live! and dost really know thy letters at so early an age?"

"By'r Lady, of all children ever I met, he exceedeth them in aptness at any sort of learning," cried nurse Cicely, putting of his frock straight because of its appearing somewhat rumpled; "as I live, I never heard of his fellow: wilt believe it, mistress?—if by chance I sing him a ballad—the which he is ever a calling of me to do, he will have it again and again; and, perchance, ere the day is over, he will be playing with his toys and singing of that very ballad all the whilst!"

"Oh, the dear boy!" exclaimed the draper's pretty wife, as she cuddled him closer in her arms, the mother looking on with a famous satisfaction in her features; "and canst tell me those pretty letters?" enquired she of him.

"Nay, I doubt I can tell you them all," replied the child ingenuously; "but methinks I know a good many of them." Then pointing with his finger on the several characters as he named them, he continued—"first here is A, that ever standeth astraddle;—next him is B, who is all head and body and no legs;—then cometh C, bulged out behind like a very hunchback;—after him D, who doeth the clean contrary, for his bigness is all before;—next," here he hesitated for some few seconds, the others present regarding him with exceeding attentiveness and pleasure—"next here is—alack, I have forgotten of what name this one is called: mother, pray you tell me again!" It was told him presently. Then went he on as before, with great seriousness naming of the letters with some few mistakes, in most of which he quickly corrected himself, and coming to a halt when he was in any doubt of the matter—which ended in his asking help of his mother—none interrupting him till he came to the last of them.

"There is a scholar for you!" cried nurse Cicely in an ecstacy of admiration; "saw any such wonderful cleverness? O' my Christian conscience, I am amazed at beholding of such a marvel! Well, an' he come not to be some famous learned clerk I shall be hugely disappointed."

"Dear heart, how I love thee!" exclaimed Mistress Dowlas, kissing of him with an earnest show of affection; "nurse, prythee give me the basket; I have got him there a delicate piece of marchpane, which I doubt not will give him infinite content; and here in my purse I have got a bran new silver groat fresh from the mint, which he shall have of me as a keepsake."

"Marry, what a prodigal goodness!" cried nurse, as she did what was required of her without loss of time; "but he meriteth it well, he doth, I will be bound for him, and every good thing in this world that might grace his having."

"What say you to neighbour Dowlas for her great kindness?" enquired the much delighted mother, as her young son took in his hands her visitor's gifts.

"I thank you right heartily, neighbour Dowlas," replied he, lifting up his fair eyes with such modesty and gratefulness expressed in them, as charmed her heart to see.

"I'faith, should I be inclined to become covetous, methinks here I should find ample excuse for it," observed the draper's wife, patting of the child's rosy cheeks as she put him down from her lap: then rising, added, "But now I must hie me home as speedily as I may, for the getting of dinner ready, for indeed I have tarried so long a space since my coming out, that perchance my good master shall give me up altogether."

The draper's wife having gossipped all she had to say concerning of her neighbours and their doings, kissed the boy and his mother very lovingly, and took her leave.

Now the reader hath already had some acquaintance with those worthies, Master Alderman Dowlas and Master Alderman Malmsey, but methinks 'tis high time he should know more of them for the better understanding of this story. Both had been married some time to two as proper women as ever were seen. The former of the two was a rigid, serious, methodical fellow to all outward appearance; somewhat tall and slender, with hard solemn features, as hath been described; and the other was one of a right jolly face and portly person, with a merry dark eye, ever a winking at some pretty woman or another, and a short black beard, with hair of a like colour. Each was turned of forty, and therefore ought to have been of discreet behaviour; and as for their wives, if ever men had inducement to honest conduct, they had in possessing of such women; for they were ever of an admirable pleasant humour, of notable excellence in what in woman ought to be, and in all respects such good wives, that it was not possible to say ought to their discredit. Each was a little short of thirty, and having had no children, had not yet parted with their youthfulness, and the innocent happy carelessness which is so oft its companion. They were friends from girls, and loved each other as though they were sisters.

"Neighbour Dowlas!" cried a well-known voice, as the draper's wife was crossing to her house; and looking up, she saw her gossip Mistress Alderman Malmsey leaning out of her casement. "I pray you come in a while, I have a matter of some moment for your private ear."

"I'll come to you this very instant," answered the other, and straightway passed into the vintner's dwelling. Scarce had she got within the threshold, when the jolly vintner bustled up to her with a marvellous obsequious courtesy welcoming her to the house, pressing her to taste of his best wine, and leering in her face the whilst, whispering all sorts of sugared compliments in her ear.

"Nay, prythee, let me go!" exclaimed she, striving to free her hand, which he held in his as they stood at the bottom of the stair. "You hurt my fingers, you vile wretch, with your intolerable squeezing."

"Oh, delectable Mistress Dowlas!" cried he, kissing of her hand in a seeming rapture; "the stars are but pitiful rushlights to those exquisite bright eyes; and that delicate fair cheek out-rivalleth the peach's richest bloom."

"Away with you, and your poor flattering stuff!" said the draper's pretty wife, still striving to break away from him; "I'm not to be cozened so easily, I promise you."

"I beseech you, dearest life, allow me one sweet salute!" whispered he, in most entreating tones, as he brought his face as close as he could to her's.

"There's one, prythee, make the most on't!" exclaimed she, as she took him a box on the ear that made the place ring; and then ran laughing up stairs.

Neighbour Malmsey wore a more serious face than was her wont. At least, so thought neighbour Dowlas, as she entered her chamber; and after the customary courtesies were over, and the two were seated close together, neighbour Malmsey looked more serious still.

"I have a matter to speak of, that maketh me exceeding dull at heart," commenced Mistress Malmsey.

"Doubtless, 'tis concerning the improper behaviour of her wretch of a husband," thought Mistress Dowlas: then added aloud, "Believe me, I am infinitely concerned also."

"I hope you will not think the worse of me for telling you," continued the vintner's wife; "but I assure you, rather than allow of your being unhappy by knowing it, I have, for many years past, endured much of unpleasantness at his hands, and said nought but rebuke him for his wantonness."

"Alack, we cannot all have good husbands!" exclaimed her gossip, in a consolatory sort of manner. "Now, my Jonathan——"

"But he only groweth the bolder for my forbearance," continued neighbour Malmsey, interrupting of the other. "Indeed, he getteth to be quite abominable, and must have a speedy check put to his misdeeds, or his wickedness will soon make such a head, there will be no putting of him down."

"O' my life, I cannot count him so bad as that," observed neighbour Dowlas, as if, with a view of affording the ill-used wife some comfort. "Perchance, it is only a little wildness that good counsel will make him ashamed of speedily. Now, my Jonathan——"

"I am glad you think no worse of him," quickly answered the vintner's wife; "but methinks, it looketh to be a very shameful impudency in him to go on so, and have so good a wife."

"Ay, 'tis monstrous that, of a surety!" cried her gossip.

"But I have done with him," added neighbour Malmsey, with some earnestness; "he hath lost my good opinion long since. I will forswear his company, an' he mend not soon."

"Prythee, take not to such extreme measures!" said the other, concernedly. "Finding no profit in it, I doubt not he will alter his way, and I will take good heed he shall do you no manner of dishonesty."

"Marry, *I* can answer for that," observed her companion, "but I do assure you I have talked to him many times of the heinousness of his offence, and never at any time have given him the slightest provocation for such notorious mishehaving to you."

"Of that I feel well assured," answered neighbour Dowlas: "and if at last he do not love you as fondly as ever man loved his wife, I shall be hugely mistaken."

"Eh? What? Love *me?*" exclaimed her companion, looking in a famous wonder. "But I marvel you should make a jest of it. I would not in such a case I promise you: but it glads me infinitely to say there is no fear of such a thing. My Timothy giveth me no sort of uneasiness."

"Indeed!" cried her neighbour, seeming in a greater amazement than the other had been.

"I would your husband would take a pattern of him."

"I would nought of the kind, neighbour Malmsey," quickly ejaculated the draper's wife, with a very absolute earnestness. "I like not my husband to be ever a running after another man's wife, seeking of unlawful favours of her, as for years past Master Malmsey hath done to me, I promise you."

"My Timothy run after *you*, neighbour Dowlas!" screamed out the vintner's wife, bounding from her seat in as absolute astonishment as ever was seen.

"By my troth, yes," answered her companion.

"Oh, the horrid villain!" exclaimed the other.

"He is ever pestering of me with his foolish flatteries and protestations of love, and the like poor stuff," added the draper's wife. "I have no rest from him when I have such ill-hap as to be in his company. Nay, as I came in here he would needs have a kiss of me at the stair-foot, but I up with my hand and gave him so rude a salute on the ear, I doubt not I have taken all conceit of such favours out of his head."

"I liked not telling you of it, thinking it might vex you," continued the other, "so I bore it as good-humouredly as I could, and should not have spoken of it now had you not begun the subject upon my entering of the room."

"'Twas of Master Dowlas's shameful behaviour to me I was speaking," said the vintner's wife. "He hath followed me up and down for years in this way, spite of all I could say or do."

"What, my Jonathan!" now cried the other, starting from her chair in a greater to do than her companion had been. "The absolute wretch! But I will be even with him, I warrant you. Please you, neighbour Malmsey, to leave the revenging of the wrong done us by these pitiful hypocrites, it shall be done after such a sort as shall punish them handsomely for their intended villany, and in remembrance of it keep them from all such baseness for the future."

"That will I, and willingly, gossip," answered her companion with the tears in her eyes. "But he hath oft pressed me to give him a private meeting, prythee, say what I had best do."

"I have a merry cousin of mine, who will help us in this purpose of ours," replied Neighbour Dowlas. "So you must e'en invite him to sup with you alone at Widow Pippins'. I will do the same with my worshipful gallant, and if you learn your part of me, we will have as exquisite sport as ever misused woman had of a vile husband."

"Rely on me," said Neighbour Malmsey. "But, as I live, I hear the voice of your precious partner talking to some on the stair-foot!" exclaimed she.

"Doubtless they will both make for here, so do you as I have said, and leave the rest to my managing," added the other. She had scarce said the words, and they had reseated themselves, when, as they appeared intent upon some deep discourse, there entered Master Alderman Dowlas, with his usual great soberness of manner, having his brother alderman behind him in a rare jesting humour, as he seemed, as if quite forgetful of the box of the ear he had just had.

"Perdie! here is one about to send the town crier after you, fair Mistress Dowlas!" exclaimed he, making up to her as gallantly as ever.

"Indeed, I have marvelled hugely on account of your long stay abroad, knowing not how you had disposed of yourself," said the draper. "But I am wonderfully content to find you in such admirable company. And how doth my fair life?" whispered he, glancing at his friend's wife most enamouredly, as he followed her to a distant part of the chamber, and vowing and entreating and flattering of her, as though it were done for a very wager. Nor was Master Malmsey in any way behind him in such ill-doing, as may be supposed, for he sat down with his back to the other, before Mistress Dowlas, exercising of his tongue with the movingest expressions he could think of, and gazing at her comeliness as though it were the rarest feast for the eye that the whole world contained. Neither thought of glancing towards where was his wife. Indeed, each was too intent on what he was about to heed what the other was a doing, not imagining such a thing as his friend attempting of the same thing as he was himself straining might and main to accomplish. Howsoever, in the space of a few moments this private talk was broke up, manifestly to the exceeding contentation of these worthless husbands.

"What an absolute fool is Neighbour Malmsey, that he looketh not closer after his wife!" thought Master Alderman Dowlas, as he descended the stair, looking as solemn as an owl.

"What a very ass is Neighbour Dowlas, that he cannot see that I am making love to his wife before his face!" thought the vintner, with an inward chuckle of satisfaction at his own cleverness and better fortune.

All that day the draper appeared in a most exquisite satisfaction with himself. The seriousness of his aspect was oft disturbed with a happy smile, and as the noon wore out, he kept ever asking of the hour.

"Dame," said he at last, after he had spent a wonderful time in washing, and decking himself out in his best apparel, till he looked as spruce and stiff as a roll of buckram; "there is a certain godly man over at Hillsborough, that I have promised Neighbour Hurdle to go and hear preach this night; if, peradventure, I should tarry long, prythee, get thee to bed betimes. I am loath thy rest should be shortened by waiting up for me."

"Marry! I should like to go myself to hear the good man," observed his wife, somewhat mischievously by the way, "for methinks his preaching cannot help being as good for me as for you."

"But the distance is far too great for thy walking, dame, else, shouldst thou without fail," replied he very readily.

"Nay, but I walked to Barston last Shrovetide, which is a good mile longer," said she. "I doubt not such a journey will do me an especial good service, to say nought of the godliness of it."

"Indeed, I would take thee with all my heart," added her husband, "but since the last rains some parts of the road are utterly impassable for huge deep ponds that go right across."

"Then will we borrow John a Combe's grey horse, and I will ride behind you on a pillion," answered his wife, as if desirous of bringing him to a nonplus.

"O' my life! I cannot wait to go a borrowing now, so I must e'en wish thee good bye, and take thee another time," replied Master Dowlas; and then, as if fearful she would more strongly desire to go, as quick as he might he took himself straight out of the house. Scarce had he entered the street when he was hailed by his jolly neighbour opposite, standing at his door in his Sunday jerkin and new gallygaskins, as finely trussed as ever he was when a good score years younger. To his question where was he going so fine, the draper answered as he had told his wife, then Master Malmsey declared to the other that as his good dame had gone a visiting to her aunt's, he intended making a night on't with a few choice spirits at his cousin Birch's. Thus each were deceived, and each laughed in his sleeve at the other's credulity.

Jonathan Dowlas proceeded on his way, hugging himself in his own conceit at the pass he had brought matters to with the buxom Mistress Malmsey, till he came to the outskirts of the town, where was a small inn known as "The Rose," kept by the widow Pippins, in famous repute for her careless free humour, and fondness for jests of all sorts. The building, or buildings, for there seemed more than one, were connected by a wooden gallery that run across right in front of the yard, on one side of which lay the more respectable portion of the tenement, with its boarded front covered with grapes, that hung in famous clusters even up to the thatch. The other part looked to be the stables, pigsties, and the like sort of places. Jonathan made for the entrance, holding up his head as high as he might.

"Ha, ha! Master Alderman, art there!" exclaimed a voice from the gallery, and, looking up, the draper's eye caught sight of the widow Pippins. There was she leaning on her elbows over the railing, as if watching for him, her brown face crinkling up on her red arms, like a rasher of bacon on the burning coals. Perchance she might be laughing, but Jonathan Dowlas was not nigh enough to see very distinctly. "Get thee in quick, I prythee, and I will be with thee straight."

The alderman obeyed her bidding with a stately alacrity, and he had scarce got fairly housed when he was met by mine hostess, whose still bright eyes, albeit though she was a woman somewhat advanced in years, twinkled with a most merry maliciousness.

"Follow me," whispered she, evidently striving to suppress a laugh, and then giving him a sly nudge and a wink, added, "Oh, thou villain!" led the way to a chamber, of the which she had scarce closed the door, when she burst out into a long loud laugh, the draper looking on as though he knew not what to make of it. "By my fay, now who would have thought of this!" exclaimed she, holding of her sides, and looking at him with exceeding, yet with a monstrous ludicrous intentness. "Where didst get the powder to make so exquisite fair a woman so infinitely in love with thee as is Mistress Malmsey?" The alderman relaxed somewhat in the seriousness of his aspect at hearing this intelligence. "She doles on the very ground thou dost walk on!" continued she, and the alderman smiled outright. "But who would have suspected this of one so serious as thou art? O' my womanhood! what a very rogue thou art!" saying which she fetched Master Dowlas so sore a thump on the back, that it went some way towards the knocking of him off his legs.

"Poor Master Malmsey!" cried she, as plainly as she could in the midst of her laughing, "Alack! he hath no suspicion of his wife's huge fondness for thee, I'll be bound for't. Knowing of thy notable gravity, he cannot have the slightest colour of jealousy. But, I charge thee, use her with a proper handsomeness. She is none of your light madams—she hath a most gentle spirit, and is the very delicatest, sweetest creature I ever came anigh." Then fixing on him a look in which seriousness and mirth seemed striving for the mastery, she cried, "Go to, for a sly fox!" and hitting of him just such another thump as she gave him a moment since,—with a fresh burst of laughter—she left him to himself.

Jonathan found that he was in a long narrow chamber, strewed with rushes, with a door at each end, and one at the side, at which he had entered—having in the middle a small table set out for supper, with a larger one at the further end of the chamber, completely covered with a cloth that fell down to the ground on all sides of it, and it was fairly hung round with arras, somewhat the worse for its antiquity, for it gaped in some places sadly. He had hardly noticed these things when the door at the bottom of the room opened, and there entered Mistress Malmsey, clad in her very gayest attire, and looking, as the alderman thought, more blooming than ever he had seen her. He, with an exceeding formal sort of gallantry, hastened to get a chair for her, expressing of his extreme rapture at her goodness in giving him this appointment, and then sat himself down as close to her as he could, taking her hand very lovingly in his, and commencing his famous fine compliments, protestations, and entreaties, with an earnestness that he imagined was sure of prevailing with any woman. The vintner's wife answered with some coyness, that convinced him what the widow Pippins had said was true enough, and he straightway redoubled his exertions, fully assured his success with her was beyond all doubting.

"Divinest creature!" exclaimed the enamoured draper, looking at his companion as lack-a-daisical as a hooked gudgeon, "fairest, sweetest, superfinest she alive! I do assure thee my affections be of the best nap, and will wear in all weathers; and I will give thee such liberal measure of my love as shall make thee infinitely loath to have dealings elsewhere."

"Alack, men are such deceivers!" cried Mistress Malmsey. "They soon depart from what they promise."

"Count me not as such, I prythee," replied the alderman, "I am warranted fast, I do assure thee, I am none of such poor fabrics—I am of the finest quality, even to the fag end. Oh exquisitest Mistress Malmsey, an' you do not take pity on me straight, I must needs lie on the shelf like a considerable remnant, of which the fashion hath gone out of date."

"Hush! as I live, there is my husband's voice!" here exclaimed the vintner's wife, to the great alarm of the lover, and both started up together, seeming in a wonderful surprise and affright.

"What ho! house here!" shouted Master Alderman Malmsey, from the stair foot.

"Hide thee, good Master Dowlas, or I am lost," exclaimed the vintner's wife, and before Jonathan could look about him, she had vanished out of the bottom door; but he was not allowed time to think what he should do in such a dilemma, for he heard the footsteps of his neighbour close upon the door, so, as speedily as he could, he crept under the table at the further end of the room, imagining that the other was merely paying of a passing visit, as he was proceeding to his cousin Birch's, and would tarry but a short time. Here he lay snugly ensconced, not daring to peep out for fear he should be seen. Presently, in came the jolly vintner, humming of a tune, and bandying jests with the Widow Pippins, who led the way with a light—it getting to be nigh upon dark—and, by her loud laughing, was in as fine a humour at beholding him in her house, as she had before been at seeing his neighbour.

"Odds pittikins, what a jest!" cried the merry widow, putting the light upon the supper table. "Happy man!" added she, looking on him as seriously as she could, and then giving him a sly poke on the ribs, exclaimed, as plain as her loud laughing would allow, "But what a monstrous poor fool is her husband!" At which saying of hers Master Malmsey joined in the laugh right earnestly.

"There is never such an ass in Stratford," said he, when his mirth would allow him words. "He is so weak of conceit in the matter that he will allow of my making love to his wife before his eyes. But mum, widow—mum's the word," said he, mysteriously. "I should not like of his knowing what kindness I am doing him. Mayhap he would take it somewhat uncivil of me. So be close, widow, I prythee."

"As a fox," replied the other, knowingly.

"Dost not think, a man who taketh no better heed of his wife, ought to be so served?" enquired the vintner.

"O' my troth, yes!" answered the widow, breaking out into a fresh peal of laughter: "and trust me, I would think it good sport to help make a fool of him."

"I thank thee exceedingly," said Master Malmsey.

"Nay, thou hast small cause of thanks, believe me, Master Alderman," replied his merry companion, with the tears running down her cheeks from sheer mirth; "I do it out of good will—out of good will, I do assure thee." Then nudging him o' the elbow, having an exceeding sly look with her, she added, "Art thou not a rogue now—an especial rogue—a very cozening rogue, to make the flower of all Stratford to be so taken with thee?"

"It cometh entirely of her fool of a husband," answered the vintner, chuckling mightily. "He would allow of our being together at all times, and was ever thrusting of her, as it were, into my arms. How could I help myself. I am but a man, and she so exquisite sweet a creature! So, whilst he was humming and hawing to my good dame, I had her up in a corner, making of love to her by the hour together."

"Fie on thee, Master Alderman!" said she, shaking her head as if with a famous seriousness. "Thou art a dangerous man for any poor woman to be with, so I will e'en be quit of thy company. I'faith thou art a sad rogue." Then fetching him a poke i' the ribs that made him gasp for breath, she hurried out of the room, laughing more heartily than ever.

All this made Jonathan Dowlas prick up his ears, and he marvelled hugely who could be the frail wife his neighbour was enamoured of, as he had had no suspicion of such a thing; whereof the knowledge of it he had now gained, made him think his designs on Mistress Malmsey a proper punishment for his brother alderman's unpardonable conduct towards his friend, whoever he might be. Full of all sorts of speculations on the matter, he remained in his hiding place without moving, for he could hear the vintner humming of a tune, and walking to and fro, and was cautious his hiding place might not be discovered. Presently the door opened and some one entered, whom Master Malmsey addressed in such a manner as made Jonathan feel assured it was the very woman the other declared he so loved. She answered in so small a voice she could not be well heard in the draper's hiding place; and, in a minute after, the two seated themselves at the farther end of the room, where, although he heard each word his neighbour spoke, because of the greater loudness of his speech, of his companion distinguished he never a word, it seemed to be uttered in such a whisper. The extreme movingness of the vintner's speech at last filled his neighbour with so absolute a curiousness to know who it was the other was so intent upon loving, that he began, with wonderful cautiousness, to lift up a part of the table cover, so that he might take a peep without being seen.

The first thing he got sight of was neighbour Malmsey, kneeling on one knee with his hand to his heart, with nothing but the most desperate and uncontrollable affection in his looks, and such an absolute irresistableness in his speech, that it was as if no woman must stand against it. Before him was seated a female very prettily attired, whose face being somewhat in the shade, and a little turned from him, Master Dowlas could not at all make out. The candle wanted snuffing abominably, or perchance he would have seen better.

"Prythee turn not away those lustrous eyes," exclaimed the vintner in a rare impassioned manner; "the poor knave thy husband heedeth not their brightness; and that most delicious lip, that rivalleth my choicest wines in the tempting richness of its hue,—why should such a sorry fellow as he is have its flavour to himself, who manifestly careth not for it. All my heart longeth but for a taste. My dear sweet, prythee allow it but this once. I will be bound to thee ever after. I will hold thee in more regard than my chiefest customer. Come, we dally with opportunity. I will be bold and steal it an' thou wilt not give after so much asking." Just at this moment the speaker made an effort as if to salute his companion, and she moving at the same time brought her full face to the light, and Jonathan Dowlas beheld his own wife. A clap of thunder would not have startled him more than such a discovery; indeed so monstrous was he moved at it that he clean forgot where he was, and rising quickly hit himself so sore a crack o' the crown against the table, that he could do nought for some minutes after but rub his pate and vow vengeance against his false wife and wicked treacherous neighbour.

"By'r Lady now, I *must* go up," cried Mistress Malmsey from below, so loud that all heard her.

"O' my troth, here is your wife coming, and if she catch us I shall be undone!" exclaimed Mistress Dowlas, immediately after which the unhappy draper heard the shuffling of feet, and he was left in darkness.

"Now if his wife come here I will have excellent revenge," thought be. Presently he heard a door open, and some one cry out in a whisper—"Master Alderman!" whereupon he stealthily left his hiding place.

"Hist!" cried he, fumbling his way on tiptoe across the room.

"Hist!" replied some one else, evidently making towards him with as little noise as possible.

"Prythee where art, my honey sweet?" enquired the former; "since thy departure here hath been that most wretched villain, thy husband, seeking to do me most monstrous wickedness with my wife; but if I pay him not handsomely there is no smoothness in velvet. Come hither quick, my dear life, for I am impatient to have thee in my most fond embrace!"

"Ha, indeed!" cried Master Malmsey, who had hid himself behind the arras when his fair companion had ran off with the light, and hearing a voice cry "Master Alderman," crept out thinking she had returned to him. "Take that and be hanged to thee!" whereupon he made a blow; but being in the dark he hit nothing.

"Villain, art there!" exclaimed Master Dowlas in as towering a rage as his neighbour; "let me but get at thee, I'll maul thee I warrant;" and both proceeded to strike the empty air in a most terrible passion ever seen—ever and anon giving the panels such famous thumps that it made their knuckles smart again.

"Dost call this going to hear a godly man at Hillsborough, thou traitorous caitiff?" sarcastically asked the vintner, hitting on all sides of him, and jumping here and now there, in his desire to punish his false neighbour.

"Ay, marry, as much as it be going to Cousin Birch's," retorted the other, coming on more cautiously and with less noise, yet no less intent on vengeance. In consequence of the one being so wonderful quick in his movements, and the other so quiet he could not be heard moving, there was no harm done for a good space, save by hurting themselves stumbling over chairs and the like, which was sure to make he who was hurt in a greater rage than ever, and to be more intent upon having his vengeance of the other. It would have been a goodly sight to have seen this precious pair of husbands, if they could have been seen in the darkness, each so earnest upon punishing of the other for the same thing he was himself guilty of, and giving vent to no lack of ill names and execrations, which be who uttered quite as richly merited as he to whom they were addressed. At last the vintner got within an open door at the top of the room, where the draper pounced upon him like a cat, and as they were tussling away with all their might it was closed behind them and fastened without their knowledge. Neither had the slightest idea he was now in a different chamber, for in truth neither had time to give the matter a thought, each having enough to do to defend himself from the other's hearty cuffs, sometimes rolling together on the floor, and anon bustling each other on their legs, yet with no great damage to either. After some minutes spent this way both left off, being completely out of breath with their great exertions. Somewhat to their astonishment they heard loud bursts of laughter from the adjoining chamber, and noticing the light streaming from under the door, both impelled by the same curiousness, crept softly towards it. Jonathan Dowlas stooped to take a peep at the keyhole; Timothy Malmsey put his eye to a crack in the panel,—each was aware of the other's vicinity, but not a word was said by either. They looked, and beheld a supper-table well laid, at which two handsome gallants clad in delicate suits, with rapier and dagger, were regaling themselves and making merry, evidently to their heart's contentment; whilst the Widow Pippins stood by as if waiting upon them, and giving them a narration, which she seemed as though she could scarce tell for laughing.

"Indeed, an' it please your worships, it be the very excellentest trick ever I heard of," said she, holding of her sides. "Here came these poor fools of husbands, each desperately enamoured of his friend's wife, which these merry women allowed of only that they might the better punish them as they deserved. I'faith, what wittols must they have been to have fancied themselves likely to prevail with such. They ought to have known that when a pretty woman is so inclined she looketh to something above her. There is no temptation in it else. Little guess Master Dowlas and Master Malmsey, that 'tis your worships they care for, and none other."

"Here's a horrid villany come to light!" muttered the draper.

"Oh, what a vile quean have I for a wife!" exclaimed the enraged vintner in the same low voice.

"Little guess they how oft you two have had secret meetings here with their buxom wives," added the widow; "or what exquisite sweet pleasures you have found in their delectable company."

"O' my word, neighbour, methinks we have been foully wronged!" cried Jonathan in a monstrous dismal tone.

"'Slight, there be no doubt on't!" answered Timothy, manifestly in a still worse to do. "Alack! my head aches horribly."

"By my troth, I do feel a sort of shooting pain there myself," added the other rubbing his forehead with his palm very dolefully.

"I pray your worships, make haste," continued the laughing widow. "There is Mistress Malmsey below stairs, and Mistress Dowlas in the next chamber wonderfully impatient to have with them their several lovers. Never saw I women so dote on men as they dote on your worships. Alack for their simple husbands!"

"We've been infamously abused, neighbour!" exclaimed the draper, whilst the others in the next chamber were laughing very merrily. "As I live, we are two miserably wretched husbands."

And thereupon, mayhap out of sympathy for his brother in misfortune, he threw his arms around his neck and moaned very pitifully.

"God's precious! I shall go mad!" cried the vintner lifting up one leg and then the other, like a goose treading on hot bricks. "But shall we not burst in on these dainty gallants, neighbour, and spoil their sport?"

"Nay, nay, see you not they have weapons," whispered his more cautious companion. "Peradventure they would give us our deaths were we to venture upon them unarmed. Let us seek to get out of this place as speedily as we may, and find assistance: doubtless we shall be in time to disturb them at their villanies, and so rid ourselves of our cozening false wives, and be revenged on their paramours."

"Ha! prythee set about it on the instant," said the other; then Master Dowlas began feeling of his way along the wainscot with his brother alderman close at his heels doing the like thing, till they came to a door, which was soon opened by the former, and to the great joy of both, proved to lead out into the gallery. From here they were not long before they found themselves in the parlour of the house, where was a famous company assembled of their friends and neighbours, among whom were John Shakspeare, the high bailiff, and Oliver Dumps, the constable. These were quickly informed of the grievous wrong doing, in such moving terms, that the whole party, arming themselves with what weapons they could conveniently lay a hold on, proceeded under the command of their chief magistrate to seize upon the offenders.

"What a villanous world is this!" exclaimed Oliver, putting on his most melancholy visage. "Marry, an' aldermen's wives must needs take to such evil courses, how shall a constable's wife escape?"

They soon burst into the chamber, where they found the two gallants up in a corner with their backs towards them, with the Widow Pippins standing in a manner as though she would not have her guests rudely meddled with.

"Hullo, my masters!" exclaimed she. "Are ye mad—that ye enter thus unmannerly before two gentlemen of worship?"

"Mind her not, neighbours—she is nothing better than a very villanous go-between!" exclaimed Master Alderman Malmsey, in his deadly rage flourishing of a spit he had got in his hand as if he would do one or other of them some dreadful injury.

"These be the same two fine fellows that must needs be meddling with our wives:—I will take my oath on't!" cried Master Alderman Dowlas in a horrible bad passion, pointing towards them with the kitchen poker.

"Down with them!" shouted one.

"Let us despatch them straight!" bawled a second.

"By goles, we will be their deaths—the monstrous villains that cannot let honest men's wives alone," cried a third; and all seemed moving forward with mischief in their looks.

"Respect the law, neighbours, respect the law!" exclaimed the constable, striving all he could to repress the desire for instant vengeance so manifest in his companions.

"Ay, we must have no violence, my masters," added John Shakspeare. "If these persons have done aught amiss, I will take care they shall answer for it, but I cannot allow of their being hurt."

"Oh, what monstrous behaviour is this in an honest woman's house!" cried the widow Pippins.

"Stand aside, Mistress, I prythee," exclaimed Oliver Dumps, pushing by the widow, and seizing hold of one of the gallants by the shoulder, added in a louder voice, "surrender you in the queen's name."

"Now, neighbour Dowlas," said John Shakspeare, "look you in the face of this one, and say if you can swear him to be the villain that playeth the wanton with your wife: and you, neighbour Malmsey, do the same with the other."

"I warrant you," replied both, moving with alacrity, and with the terriblest revengeful aspects ever seen, to do what their high bailiff had required. Each caught hold of one of the dainty young gentlemen with great rudeness, and poked his beard close in his face, and each at the same moment started back as though he had been shot, amid the loud laughter of every one in the room. These gallants proved to be no other than their own wives; and all present had been let in the secret by them for the more complete punishing of their faithless husbands.

"Go to, for a sly fox!" cried the Widow Pippins, giving Master Dowlas just such another famous slap of the back as she had saluted him with on his first entrance to the chamber. "I'faith, thou art a sad rogue," added she, fetching Master Malmsey so absolute a poke i' the ribs that it put the other poke, bad as he had thought it, clean out of his remembrance. The jests that were broke upon these poor aldermen by their neighbours were out of all calculation, and they were so ashamed they could say never a word for themselves. And indeed they made a famous pretty figure—their best apparel being all covered with dust and broken rushes from rolling on the floor, and their hands and faces, hair and beards, instead of being in such delicate trim as when they first entered "The Rose," were in as dirty a pickle as was any chimney-sweep's. However, they ever after turned out to be the best of husbands, and would as lief have taken a mad bull by the horns, as sought to make love to another man's wife.

CHAPTER VI.

And then the whining SCHOOL-BOY
With satchel and shining morning face
Creeping, like snail, unwillingly to school.
SHAKSPEARE.

Some there are,
Which by sophistick tricks, aspire that name
Which I would gladly lose, of necromancer;
As some that use to juggle upon cards,
Seeming to conjure, when indeed they cheat;
Others that raise up their confederate spirits
'Bout windmills, and endanger their own necks
For making of a squib; and some there are
Will keep a curtal to shew juggling tricks,
And give out 'tis a spirit; besides these,
Such a whole ream of almanack-makers, figure flingers,
Fellows, indeed, that only live by stealth,
Since they do merely lie about stolen goods,
They'd make men think the devil were fast and loose,
With speaking fustian Latin.
WEBSTER.

"BRING hither thy hat, William, I prythee, 'tis nigh upon school time," said Dame Shakspeare to her young son, as they were together in her chamber.

"Ay, that is it," replied he, doing what he was desired with a very cheerful spirit. "'Sooth, though I lack knowing what manner of pleasure is found in school, methinks it must needs be none so little, nurse Cicely speaketh of it so bravely." The mother carefully smoothed the hat, and placed it on her child's head, smiling the whilst, either at what had just fallen from him, or mayhap at his exceeding comeliness, now she had, after infinite pains-taking, attired him with such a shew of neatness and cleanliness as made him appear worthy of any mother's love, were she the proudest in the land.

"Nay, school hath its pains also," replied she; "but such are unknown of any, save unworthy boys, who care more for play than for book, and will learn nothing that is set them."

"Well, an' they behave so ill, it be plain they deserve no better," observed the boy. "Yet, it seemeth to me, from what I have learned of nurse Cicely in ballads and stories, and from such sweet verses as you have oft times repeated to me concerning of brave knights and fair ladies, that if other pleasures of a still sweeter sort are to be found in books, whereof you can know only by going to school and conning your lesson with all proper diligence, school cannot help being as pleasant a place for good boys as any goodly place that can be named."

"Doubtless," answered the mother, evidently pleased at noting in her son such sensibleness at so early an age. Then she busied herself in putting each part of his dress as it should be, smoothing this, and pulling down that, and turning him round with a thorough, yet most affectionate scrutiny, that no fault should escape her. At last, she appeared satisfied with her labours, and hanging round his neck a satchel, that looked as if it contained no great weight of books, she quickly put on her own hat and cloak, and laying hold of him by one hand, carrying of a basket in the other, with many cheerful pleasant words to his unceasing interrogatories, she led him out at the door.

The good dame and her young son proceeded together through a part of the town, with such passing commendation and salutations from such of the neighbours as were standing at their doors or approaching them as they went, till they came to the lane where John a Combe was set on by Master Buzzard and his man Saul, as hath been related, when, in the middle of some speech of his, the boy let go his mother's hand, and as forgetful of school, of goodly books, and of sweet verses—which had formed the staple of his talking all along—as though such things had never been, he on a sudden, darted off as fast as he could after a butterfly that came flying past him. Dame Shakspeare called many times, but it appeared as if he heard not her voice, for with his hat in his hand he ran, now on one side of the lane, now on the other, and now dodging hither and thither wheresoever the dainty insect spread its delicate wings, as if there could not be in this whole world any one thing of such huge importance to him as the catching of that butterfly. At last, his mother was obliged to hasten after him, finding he heeded not her calling, called she ever so, and succeeded in overtaking her little truant, just as he stood, with his hat thrown on the grass in a vain essay to catch what he had been in such earnest chase of—with hands and eyes uplifted, watching with some vexedness in his aspect, the swift retreat of the enticing insect over the hedge.

Some scolding followed this as the good dame wiped her son's hot face, and dusted and smoothed his hat, and set it on his head again; but he made such famous excuses concerning of the marvellous beautifulness of this same butterfly beyond all butterflies he had ever seen, that the loving mother contented herself in the end with kissing him, and bidding him never again run from her side. The great delight he had found in what he had previously talked so largely of now left him altogether, and he could say nought, save of what rare pleasure would have been his had been it his good hap to have captured that choice fly, with sundry pertinent questions concerning of whence came such brave toys, how lived they, and whether they could not be kept at home, and fed on marchpane, and such other delicates as he could give them, to all which she answered as she best could. On a sudden he started a new subject, for spying of many wild flowers on the bank he must needs stop to gather some. In vain, his mother reminded him of what great promise he had made of diligence in learning, and alacrity in going to school, he implored so movingly, she could not help allowing him what he required of her; and this led to his stopping at other flowers he saw, to do the like thing, making such pretty exclamations of admiration at the sight of them, that the good dame could not find it in her heart to speak of his tarrying as he did, with any harshness. Presently, a bird flitting through the hedge, would make him pause in a strange wonder to look after it; and all his talk of flowers in a moment changed to as importunate a questioning upon the birds. Indeed, school now seemed to have no more charm for him than hath the brightest landscape for a blind man; and he kept so tarrying for this thing and for the other, as shewed he was in no little reluctance to be taken away from such fair sights.

Certes, it is a long lane that hath no turning, and the boy, with his mother, got at last to their journey's end, which proved to be a low mean building at the outskirts of the town, whereof part of the casement having been broken, the missing panes had been pasted over with leaves of copy-books. It was a wooden building, crumbling with age in many places, with a ragged thatch, of so dark a colour it could not help being of some standing, underneath which were sundry nests, with the birds flying in and out; and upon it, up to the roof-top, was a famous company of sparrows, flitting about and making so great a chirrupping as was wonderful to hear. The door being open, there was heard a low murmuring as of the humming of a whole hive of bees, which increased in loudness as they came nearer, till it was interrupted by a loud rough voice, calling out "Silence!" when it sunk a little. At this moment they entered at the door. They came first into a chamber with a brick flooring, where they saw a number of small boys; some seated upon old forms, clipped at the corners, and carved with letters of every sort, as might be seen by the empty ones; and others, in groups, standing before one or two bigger boys, each of whom held a book as if hearing the others their lessons; but as soon as the strangers were observed, there was seen on the instant an infinite lack of both learning and teaching amongst all. One whispered to another—others pointed—and some stood up to have a better view; and all stretched their necks, and strained their eyes, in a very absolute marvel, as to the intent of the dame and her son in coming there at that time.

The two were curiously and stedfastly gazed on by every boy there, as they advanced up two steps that led to a part of the same chamber, having a boarded floor, where were some long desks, at which bigger boys had been writing of copies, with one of a greater height at the top, where sat on a tall stool no less a personage than Stripes the schoolmaster, of whom the reader hath already some knowledge. He sat up still as a post; his gaunt visage as thin and sharp as though his ordinary diet was of flint stones, or other such matter that affordeth wonderful poor nourishment; his hair and beard standing in great need of the barber's art; an old gaberdine on, which for its rags the cursedest old Jew that ever clipped coin would have been ashamed to have been seen in; his falling bands rumpled and soiled; his bases open at the knees, and his hose in slovenly folds falling down his shrunk shanks to his heels, where a pair of huge pantofles, of the oldest out of all doubt, hid in some measure the numberless holes that had there begun to show themselves. He held a cane upright in one hand, and in the other a book, having before him a boy, who, by the earnest scratching of his head, and the intentness of his gaze at the broken ceiling, had doubtless come to a halt in his lesson; and his dull stupid face wore an aspect of severe seriousness, which boded no good to the young student. But for all this, as he caught sight of Dame Shaspeare with her son advancing towards him, the cane was put out of sight in the twinkling of an eye, and a sort of something that was meant to be a smile became visible in his cadaverous countenance, as he gave the unprepared scholar back his book, and bade him to his place.

Marvellous to look on was the suavity with which the pedagogue heard Dame Shakspeare say she had brought her son William to have his schooling, hoping he would prove an apt scholar; thereupon famously did he launch out into all manner of fine scholar-like phrases, whereof it was in no way easy for any to find where lay the sense, and then proceeded he to catechise the child in a monstrous pedantical humour, and to examine him as to the extent of his acquirements in the rudiments of profane learning; and although the boy shewed some shyness, which was exceeding natural at his age, before so forbidding a person, yet, by dint of his mother's praises, he was got to evince a tolerable acquaintance with the spelling of simple words. All this time the curiousness of the entire school exceedeth conception. No sign of studiousness was visible in any; instead of which the eyes and ears of the whole assembly were bent upon getting the completest knowledge of what was going on; and whilst some of the highest part of the school kneeled on their seats, or leaned over their schoolfellows, sundry of the bottom part stood on their forms, and a few crept up the steps, with countenances all agog to learn as much as they could of this strange matter.

"And I have brought you here a fine capon for your own eating, worthy Master Stripes," said Dame Shakspeare to the schoolmaster, whose mouth seemed to water at the very name of such delicate food, as she took from her basket a fowl carefully wrapped about in a clean white cloth; "the which I hope will prove to your liking, and I do trust you will favour me in what my heart most covets, so much as to give what attentiveness you can to my boy's schooling, that he may do you credit in his after years."

"I am a very heathen an' I do not," replied he, taking the gift with a famous willingness.

"Then I will now leave him to your charge," observed the dame, and, kissing of her young son, with a loving admonition to be a good boy and speed in his learning, she departed out at the door. Stripes, first placing of his new scholar amongst others of his age in the lower room, which movement of his caused a famous shew of studiousness amongst all the boys he came nigh, and setting him a lesson, returned to his desk; and then, undoing the cloth, examined the capon both with his eyes and his nose, with such extreme satisfaction, it looked as though he cared not to wait for the cooking. At last, putting it in the cloth again, he marched with it out at a door close upon his desk, feasting his eyes upon it as he went. Scarce had the door well closed upon him, when there arose such a hubbub in the school, of talking and shouting one to another of all the boys concerning of the new comer; those who had some knowledge of his parentage telling others who had none, and some of the bigger boys leaving their places to have a closer view of him, or ask him questions, as seemed to astonish William Shakspeare exceedingly; but he was not allowed to be in a long marvel, for the door opened presently, and then there was an instant scuttling to places, and an infinite affectation of attentiveness every where. Speedily as this was done it escaped not the eye of the master, who seized on his cane in a twinkling as soon as he had entered, with an eye of severe menace, and thundered out his commands for sundry of the offenders to come up to him without delay; for although he was so obsequious in his spirit before Sir Nathaniel and others he was fearful of offending, no greater a tyrant ever lived than was he to his scholars.

"So, Jemmy Sheepshanks!" cried he, as the first offender approached him with some backwardness; "prythee, what need hadst out of thy proper seat without any colour of warrant, thou horribly abominable young caitiff?"

"An' it please you, master, I only——"

"Silence!" shouted the pedagogue in a voice that appeared to make the little culprit shake in his shoes. "Art not ashamed to have accommodated thy worthlessness with the graces of my instruction for so long a time as thou hast, and never so much as brought me a single egg, much less a fine capon, such as worthy Dame Shakspeare, on her first coming, hath appurtenanced me with—and thy mother having such a prodigal store of poultry? By Jove, his searching thunders! thou art as barren of good fruit as a whipping-post. Prythee, hold me thy digital extremity."

"In good fay, master, I only went——"

"Thy hand, Jemmy Sheepshanks!" bawled Stripes, in a manner which brought forth a right dolorous wailing, and the tremulous projection of a palm of considerable dirtiness a few inches before the offender's stomach. "Elevate it somewhat!" continued he, eyeing the shaking fingers as a vulture would the prey he was about to sweep down upon. "Somewhat more!" added he in a louder voice; and whack went the descending cane across the dirty little hand. "Ya!" screamed the boy, and thereupon he doubled himself up as if he had an inward pain of great fierceness, and then he shook his hand, rubbed it against his jerkin, and held it in the other, as though he had had a hot cinder in it, and made such a yelling all the whilst as was pitiful to hear.

"And now thy sinister manus; for methinks it be very monstrous injustice one should 'scape, and the other not," observed the schoolmaster, getting his weapon in readiness.

"Nay, o' my life, good Master Stripes!" roared the urchin in a deprecating tone; but he was not let off so easy, for the left hand presently fared as badly as the right, and then, with a parting crack o' the crown for jerking his hand away, so that the pedagogue missed it more than once, Jemmy Sheepshanks in a terrible uproar was sent back to his seat. The rest of those who had been called up looked on as though they would have given all they were worth to have been a good hundred miles from the spot. The other boys were studying of their separate tasks with a seeming diligence that could never have been exceeded, and their new schoolfellow was thinking in his mind, from this first example he had had of school, it was no such brave place after all. Each of the offenders went through the same discipline, save the last, and was as well reminded as the first had been of certain remissness on his part in not having brought some nice thing or other for their worthy master.

"Ha, Mat Turnspit! thou art most superlatively offensive!" exclaimed the pedagogue, looking at the remaining one with the same savage aspect as had been the forerunner of the other's punishments. "I have cast up the sum of thy offences, the product whereof——"

"An' it please you, master, father killed a hog last night," cried out the boy, sharply, yet not without some trepidation.

"Marry, what then? The particularities—the conclusion, I prythee!" cried his master.

"An' it please you," answered little Mat, "mother told me to say, an' your worship's stomach stood in any way affected towards pig's chitlings, she would send you as famous a dish of them as should delight the cockles of your heart mightily."

"Thy mother, I would wager to be as honest a woman as any of her inches," observed Scrapes, his aspect of a sudden changing to an absolute graciousness. "And touching pig's chitlings, I would have thee communicate to her auditories, I consider them as savoury diet as any thing that can be eaten, and will accept of a dish with abundance of thanks. As for thyself, Mat Turnspit, I doubt not thou hadst excellent cause for being out of thy seat. Get thee back again straight, and be sure thy remembrance plays not the truant with the pig's chitlings."

After this, the first class were called up to their reading lesson, and putting up their caps, each holding of a book, presently stood in a half circle before their teacher, who, seated on his high stool, with his cane in his hand, and the lesson before him, never failed to apply the former to the palms of such as were amiss in their reading—constantly commenting on the exceeding properness of behaviour shewn by Dame Shakspeare and Dame Turnspit, in the matter of the fat capon and the pig's chitlings. All this while there was a famous thinking going on in the young mind of the new scholar, whose faith in the pleasantness of schools diminished with every blow he heard given, till at last he came to the conclusion, that it was the very horriddest bad place he had ever entered: nevertheless he applied himself to his lesson as earnestly as he might, with no greater interruption than what came from some little neighbour sidling up to him with a civil speech, intent upon being on the best of terms with a schoolfellow so well recommended of their master.

As Stripes was very furious lecturing of a boy, about to undergo the customary discipline, the door behind him opened, and there appeared at it a strange looking object in the likeness of an overgrown boy. To all appearance, the schoolmaster looked as lean a dog as ever licked an empty trencher, but he was of a very corpulency in comparison with the walking bunch of bones known throughout the town as Skinney Dickon, the schoolmaster's boy, that now entered the school-room. His face had the projecting jaws of a ravenous crocodile, with the complexion of a kite's foot, and his rusty hair straggled over his skull like a mop worn to the very stump—this was supported on a long thin neck bare of all clothing to the shoulder blade, where a leather jerkin, made for a boy half his size, was buttoned tight with a small skewer (for lack of buttons, which had all been worn off), whereof the sleeves came only to his elbows, shewing his naked arms, like the picked-drum sticks of some huge fowl, with the claw left on. A pair of greasy gaskins, that seemed as though they had been made for a grasshopper, encased the lower part of his body to his knees, below which two bare legs, as barren of calf as an andiron, descended till they were partly lost sight of in two old shoes, whereof the wide gaping of the upper leathers told plainly of the whereabouts of the owner's ten toes.

"How now, Dickson!" exclaimed his master, as soon as he became aware of the other's vicinity.

"An' it pul-pul-pul-pul, please your worship, the kick-kick-kick-kick cat's run off with the kick-kick-kick-kick capon." Scarce had the words got loose from the chopping teeth of his stuttering boy, ere Stripes jumped from his stool with a ludicrous astounded look, and brushing by his intelligencer with such furiousness as to lay him his length on the floor, sought the thief, swearing all sorts of horrible oaths and direful imprecations; after running frantically to and fro, the enraged schoolmaster spied puss on a shelf in an outhouse, tearing up the flesh of the fowl after a fashion as evinced her appreciation of its goodness. She was an old, large, black animal, whose projecting ribs manifested the like relationship with famine as appeared in the master and his boy; and, made desperate by extreme hunger, she raised her back, glared with her green eyes, and commenced so brisk a spitting and swearing, as the schoolmaster, in a terrible tearing passion, began cutting at her with his cane—though at a respectful distance—as proved she would not be got to part with her prize without a tustle; and mayhap he would have been but badly off had she flown at him, the which she appeared monstrously inclined to do, but at this moment she spied Dickon hastening to the rescue with the stump of a broom, which caused her to make a movement as though she would carry off her booty—however, before she had got a firm hold of the fowl with her old teeth, Dickon gave her so sore a blow with his weapon as sent her flying off the shelf into an open water-butt that stood a yard or so off, whereupon she was glad enough to save her nine lives the best way she could, as if capons had never been.

This occurred not without some stir in the school; but scarce had

Stripes returned to his desk after placing of his heart's treasure in a place of safety, when his anatomy of a boy again made his appearance at the open door, at sight of whom he opened his lanthorn jaws, quite aghast with surprise, thinking that the villanous cat had again made away with his dainty; but Dickon came only to announce the arrival of one Mother Flytrap on an errand of conjuring, which speedily allayed his master's alarm. Dismissing the class to their seats with a perilous threat kept they not as quiet as mice till his return, the pedagogue stalked, with an air of marvellous solemnity—little in accordance with his slovenly gaunt figure—into an inner chamber, meanly furnished with an old table and a chair or two, yet having, in the shape of a globe in the window, a snake in a bottle over the chimney, and a curious hieroglyphic book spread out upon the table: various signs that it was in especial use for learned purposes. A little woman, whose shrivelled skin savoured of some antiquity, stood in a corner of the chamber, in a grey cloak and peaked hat, leaning with both hands upon a stick she held before her.

"An' it please your worship," began she, parting the exceeding closeness of her nose and chin, and hobbling two steps forward as Stripes entered, "be it known to you, of all the days in the year, last Wednesday was a week, wanting of a spoon for a gossip of mine—as worthy a good soul as ever broke bread, for all it hath been said of her she taketh to her aqua vitæ bottle more than is becoming in an honest woman:—but Lord! Lord! who shall escape the bruit of slanderous tongues in this cantankerous age;—as I was a saying, over a sea-coal fire, at Dame Marigold's—who was making as famous a bowl of spiced ale, with a roasted crab, as ever passed mortal lips. Indeed, of all women I know, an' it please your worship, she excelleth in the brewing of such delicate liquor; and last sheepshearing I did hear little Jack Maggot, of Maggot Mill—he that got his head broke at a bout at single stick with Job Styles, the hedger of our town—say he knew none of these parts that had such cunning in these preparations. Mercy o' my heart! I have known the time when Job Styles was better off than he is, by a good ten crowns a year. But we are all mortal."

"Hast lost a spoon?" enquired the schoolmaster, when his companion stopped to take breath.

"Ay, marry," replied Mother Flytrap, "as goodly a silver Evangelist as you shall find come of any godfather; and the only one of the four left. O' my word, it vexeth me to find the world groweth every day more dishonest; and no more heed is taken of so godly a gift as an Evangelist spoon, than of a dish of beans. Well—flesh is grass; so its what we must all come to—more 's the pity—more 's the pity."

"When lost thou this spoon?" asked Stripes.

"Marry, an' it please your worship, I know not," replied his companion; "but last Wednesday was a week, as I have said, when it was getting nigh upon noon, I had made me a porridge fit for the Sophy, with good store of leeks in it, for my dinner, when who should enter at my door but Gammer Bavins, whose son went to the wars and died beyond seas; whereupon desiring of her to rest herself, as in all civilness I was bound, seeing that her mother's cousin's great uncle and my grannum were cousins-german, I asked of her to have some of my famous porridge, to the which she cheerfully gave her consentings; and thinking 'twould be but respectful of me to allow of her having a silver spoon instead of a latten one, the whilst she was telling of me an excellent famous story of what brave eating was in porridge such as she was wont to make for her Gaffer when he came home from the woods—for your worship must know he had been a woodman, and of some repute in the craft—and how monstrously he took to it when she could chop in a handsome piece of bacon fat, with a pinch of mustard—though for mine own part methinks good hog's lard in some quantity, with a sprinkling of bay salt, giveth much the delicater flavour——"

"So the spoon was missing?" here put in the schoolmaster.

"La you! what a wonderful conjuror is your worship!" exclaimed Mother Flytrap, lifting up her hands and eyes in amazement; "ay, was it: and though I have since searched high and low in every crack and cranny hole and corner from housetop to floor, if I have caught as much as a glimpse of it there is no hotness in ginger. Peradventure——"

"Thou hast come to learn of thy missing spoon?" said Stripes, knowing full well should he let her run on there would be no stopping of her tongue.

"Odds codlings, yes, an' it please you," replied she: "well! never saw I your like at finding out things: as I live I said not a word of the sort. Mayhap your worship knoweth whom I suspect of stealing it; and by my troth I doubt not it shall be found without some grounds, for she hath the reputation of a horrible pilferer."

"Thy suspicions rest upon a woman!" answered Stripes, with a very proper solemnity.

"A grace of God! your worship must needs have dealings with the old one!" cried his companion in a famous astonishment; "Marian Loosefish be as nigh to a woman as ever she will be, for she hath had two children and never a husband, and hath been thrice put into the stocks for misbecomingness. But we are all mortal. More's the pity—more's the pity!"

"And thou wouldst have me ascertain by virtue of my art with what correctness thou dost suspect this woman?" added the schoolmaster.

"Ay, dear heart, out of all doubt, and I have brought your worship as exquisite nice a blackpudding as ever was made," answered the other, producing from under her cloak a large sausage of this sort, which her companion eased her of with marvellous alacrity; "and will, besides, give your worship a tester for your pains, provided you can put the stealing of it upon her with such certainty she shall never be able to deny it, and so I get back my spoon again."

"Prythee stay where thou art, and keep strict silence," said the schoolmaster, with a very earnest seriousness, as he took a long black wand out of a corner, and put on his head a strange looking conical cap, of a blood-red colour, which made his visage look all the more lean and ghastly; then gazed he with terrible severity on his book, turning over the leaves for some minutes, Mother Flytrap looking on with a fearful curiousness, as dumb as a stone.

"Mercury in the sixth house," muttered the conjuror, as if to himself.

"I warrant you that is my house; for mine is just the sixth in the row as you enter the town," observed she.

"Silence, woman!" shouted Stripes, authoritatively; then presently added in an under tone—"Jupiter and Venus in conjunction, whereof the affinities in equilibrio being geometrical to their qualities, giveth sign of some heavy metal, of an express white colour, and in shape of some narrowness, with a concavity at the determination. Ha! what meaneth this?—Diana under a cloud——"

"That's her, an' it please you!" said Mother Flytrap, eagerly; "she hath been 'under a cloud' at sundry several times, which be well known of many, for she is as absolute a——"

"Peace, I tell thee!" bawled the conjuror: "wouldst turpify my astrologicals? Prythee hold thy prate:" after which he continued without other interruption a deal more of similar heathenish words. "My art telleth me these three things," observed he to her at last, as grave as any judge; "to wit—thy spoon hath been stolen, an' thou hast not mislaid it in some secret place;—provided a thief hath got it, there shall be no doubt it hath been stolen;—and should it be found upon Marian Loosefish, beyond all contradicting she may be suspected of the theft."

"Wonderful!" cried the old woman, in a huge amazement; "of all conjuring never heard I of anything like unto this! I would have sworn it was her before your worship had told me a letter of her name; for I have all along suspected her and no other. I protest I am in so great an admiration of your worship's marvellous deep knowledge I scarce know what to be at. Odds codlings, what wonders the world hath!"

"At thy peril, speak another word till I tell thee!" exclaimed the reputed conjuror, in a formidable solemn voice, as if desirous of still more impressing his customer with his thorough knowledge of the occult science: "I charge thee make no manner of noise, else ill will befall thee. I would know more of this matter, and will have my familiar to acquaint me with the particularities." At this the old dame, dumb with extreme fright and curiousness, backed herself into a corner of the chamber, as Stripes, waving of his wand mysteriously, and repeating some unintelligible jargon, stalked round and round the table. All at once they heard a horrible strange sort of sound like unto the deep grunting of an over-fed hog, which the conjuror, in ignorance of its cause, fancied to be something unnatural coming to punish him for his vain-glorious boast of intimacy with a familiar, and straightway stopped his conjurations; and Mother Flytrap, too frightened to speak, hearing the sounds, and observing the half-starved black cat at this moment push her way through the unclosed door,—her back raised and her eyes glaring as she caught sight of her master with the uplifted wand, supposing he was about to punish her for her dishonesty,—had no doubt she was a demon invoked by the schoolmaster, and thereupon striking out with her stick convulsively before her, she commenced crouching down into the corner, every time uttering of a scream so piercing, it seemed as though she were about giving up the ghost.

Her outcry soon brought Skinny Dickon into the chamber, who, spying of the two in such a terrible monstrous fear, looked from one to the other with his jaws gaping like a hungry pike, till hearing of the strange unearthly sound, and seeing his master had been at his conjurations, a horrible suspicion seemed to come across him of a sudden; and he dropped on his knees as though he had been shot. Presently some of the scholars came creeping towards the door, the back ones peeping over the forward ones' shoulders, with aspects alarmed and anxious; and the old woman's screams continuing, sundry of the neighbours rushed in at another door by which she had herself entered, marvelling prodigiously to hear such a disturbance; and marvelling the more, to note what they beheld at their entrance.

"In God's name, neighbour, what meaneth this strange scene?" enquired a sober honest-looking artisan, in his leather apron and cap, gazing from one to another of the group in a famous astonishment.

"Ya!" screamed Mother Flytrap, again crouching down in the corner, and poking out her stick, with her eyes fixed upon the object of her exceeding terror, as though it held a spell over her.

"Mum-mum-mum-mum-Master's been — rer-rer-rer-rer-raising the devil!" stuttered out Dickon, as plain as he could, for the fright he was in.

"Ya!" repeated the old woman, with the same look and gesture.

"He's there!" muttered the trembling schoolmaster, pointing to a closet whence the sounds seemed to proceed; whereupon there was an instant backward movement of his neighbours, save only the artizan; and the old woman screamed more lustily than ever, for she believed the cat was meant, as having her gaze fixed upon the animal, she had not seen where the frightened pedagogue had pointed.

"With the Lord's help, mayhap, I will unkennel him, if there be be," observed the artisan, making a forward movement.

"Nay, o' my life, David Hurdle, thou must be mad, sure?" exclaimed one; and others cried out against his seeking of such danger, and many were for holding him, to prevent his destruction, as they thought.

"Fear nought," said the artisan, breaking from his alarmed neighbours; "we are in the Lord's hands. He will not deliver his people into the power of the spoiler." Then walking boldly up to the closet, the door of which he fearlessly opened, he added, in a firm voice, "I charge thee, if thou art an unclean spirit, depart from the dwelling of this man."

The interior was too dark for any there to see into, therefore was nothing visible; but the terror-struck people noticed the instantaneous stoppage of that smothered grunting which sounded so unearthly; and could plainly enough distinguish a rustling as of some one moving, which again caused an instant rush to the door.

"I charge thee, begone!" cried David Hurdle, undauntedly.

"What dost charge me?" grumbled a deep thick voice from the closet. "Prythee, keep it on the score, and give us 'tother pot. Eh, Ticklebreech?"

"As I live 'tis Sir Nathaniel!" cried several voices at once, to the wonderful relief of the rest; and sure enough, Sir Nathaniel it was, who, after so absolute a carouse the previous night with his customary boon companions, his senses had completely left him, had returned home with the schoolmaster, without whose knowledge he had thrust himself into the closet, where he had been snoring the whole morning, coiled up like a monstrous caterpillar; whereby he had put so sudden a stop on his friend's conjurations, and had nigh driven Mother Flytrap out of her five wits.

CHAPTER VII.

The mery larke, messangere of the day,
Salueth in her song the morowe gray;
And fire Phebus ryseth up, so bright
That all the orient laugheth at the sight:
And with his stremis dryeth in the greves,
The silver droppis hanging in the leves.

CHAUCER.

For I am servant of the lawe,
Covetouse is myne owne felowe.

OLD MORALITY.

Out on you theeffes, bouth two!
Each man maye see you be soe,
Alby your arraye
Muffled in mantles none such I know,
I shall make you loute full lowe,
Or I departe you froe.

ANTICHRIST.

MASTER BUZZARD sat at table eating of a pasty made of game birds, and ever and anon flinging a bone to one of the many dogs looking wistfully up at him. He was taking of his morning repast in the same hall of his, which hath before been described, at interims enjoying frequent and plentiful draughts at a tankard that stood close at his trencher; and then again, swearing lustily at such of the dogs who, in their impatience to have of the delicate victual, mayhap would leap to his lap, or remind him of their nearness by giving him a smart blow of the leg with one of their fore-paws. At a respectful distance, with his hat on his knees, and his stick beside it, sat the shrunk-up figure and parchment physiognomy of Jemmy Catchpole, the town lawyer, seneschal, bailiff, attorney, and steward, as he was indifferently styled.

"All precepts have been served, an' it please you," observed Jemmy Catchpole; "we have him in fee simple with fine and recovery, but the defendant pleadeth extreme poverty, and prayeth in aid that suit may be stopped from and after the determination of the last action, else shall he be forced to such shifts as shall put your honour's hand and seal to his ruin, and cut the entail from all remainders in perpetuity—in witness whereof he hath but now demised, granted, and to farm-let his desire to me that I might be a feodary in this act for such an intervallum as your honour may please to allow."

"An' I wait another hour I'll be hanged!" rudely exclaimed Master Buzzard, thumping the table with his fist with such force as to startle some of the hawks. "If he hath not the means of paying his bond, strip him of what he hath. What! Shall I lend my money to a paltry burgess, and he do me ill offices, and then, when comes time for payment, shall such a fellow think to get off by whining a dolorous plaint concerning of his poverty? 'Slife! when I let him, cut me into collops for my hounds."

"As your honour wills it," replied the lawyer; "then will I, without let or hindrance, plea or demurrer, make an extent upon his house and lands, immediately, provided in that case he doth not give instant quittance for his obligation."

"Make him as barren as a rotten branch," cried the other, with a frowning indignant look that spoke as bitterly as his words. "At one swoop bear off his whole possessions. By God's body, an' thou leavest him as much as would keep his beggarly soul for a day, I will have nought to do with thee ever after."

"I am mortgaged to your honour's will," observed his companion very humbly, as he took his hat and stick in his hand, and rose from his seat. Not long after he had taken himself out of the hall, there entered Saul, booted and spurred, and soiled with dust, as though he had just come off a journey.

"Ha, Saul, art there!" cried his master, his sullen features brightening up abit at the sight of his man; "I expected thee not so soon. But how fareth my noble kinsman?"

"As comfortless as a hound covered with bots," replied Saul, putting on a grin at his conceit. "Down Towler! Away Bess! Back Ponto!" cried he, as sundry of the dogs came leaping up to him, in sign of his having staid from them some time. "His honourable lordship walketh about like a disturbed spirit; his face hath lost the humour of smiling, and carryeth the affectation of melancholy with as much intentness as a lean raven. He crosseth his arms, and paceth his chamber, and sigheth heavily, and seemeth to have parted with all enjoyment in this world; where he papist now, I doubt not he would turn monk presently."

"'Tis well," observed Master Buzzard, taking to his meal as if with a fresh appetite, at hearing such intelligence; "I am infinitely glad matters go on there so bravely. Here, assay some of this pasty.

Perchance, thou art a hungered after thy ride." Saul waited not for a second bidding, but with the familiarity of a long-tolerated villain, drew to the table, and helped himself without stint.

"What dost think, Saul?" enquired his master, putting down his knife, and looking with a peculiar knowingness at his man, after they had been silently discussing the pasty for some few minutes.

"I'faith, I know not, master," replied the other, raising his eyes from his trencher.

"I have got that lewd rascal and poor knave in my toil at last," said Master Buzzard.

"What, John Shakspeare?" asked his companion, as though in a sort of pleased surprise.

"No other," answered his master, evidently with a like devilish satisfaction. "He shall presently be turned upon the world as bare as a callow owlet. I have taken care he shall be stripped of all his substance, even to his Sunday jerkin, and sent adrift as complete a beggar as ever lived."

"O' my life, excellent!" exclaimed his man, chafing of his hands as if in great glee; "body o' me, I have not heard such pleasant news this many a day. He will never fine me forty shillings again for breaking a man's head, I'll warrant, or coop me a whole day in the cage, on suspicion of being over civil to a comely woman, as his high bailiffship hath done. Well, an' I make not good sport of this, count my liver as white as a boiled chicken. But here's a goodly stock of patience to him, that he may bear this pitiful change of fortune as he best may!" And so saying, he lifted the tankard to his mouth, and took a hearty draught of it.

"He hath no John a Combe now to help him at his need," added Master Buzzard. "Methinks, too, I have carved out such work for that wight as will keep him like a rat to his hole; for I have at last taken such vengeance as will hurt him more than ever our rapiers could, had we succeeded as I at first wished."

"Truly, he shewed himself a very devil at his weapon," observed the other; "and handled me so in the lane—a murrain on him! I shall bear on my body the marks of his handwriting to my life's end: therefore, am I all the more glad you have given him his deserts."

"Now truss me with all speed," said his master, at the finishing of his repast, "for I am bound to Sir Thomas Lucy's, and must needs appear becomingly before his worship."

"Ay, marry," replied Saul, trussing his master's points. Shortly after which Master Buzzard mounted his horse, which had been got ready for him at the gate, and rode off in the direction of Fulbroke Park.

It was a fresh morning at the latter end of April, and great rains having fallen for some time, the young foliage was marked with such transparent green as was truly delicate to see—the hedges being fairly clothed all in their new liveries, save here and there a backward hawthorn, or a stump of an old oak the last frosts had taken a stout hold of, shewed its unsightly bare branches. On the banks there was no lack of verdure, sprinkled in famous plentifulness with groups of primroses, cuckoo flowers, snap-jacks, daisies, cowslips, violets, and other sweet harbingers of the summer season. The small birds were making a brave chirrupping in and out of the hedges—sparrows, linnets, finches, and tits, out of all number—anon, the traveller would disturb a blackbird or thrush feeding, who would fly off with some noise—close over the adjoining field of rye, high-soaring, was seen the lark, pouring from her throat such a gush of thrilling music as nought else in nature hath comparison with; at openings in the hedge might be observed glimpses of the adjoining country, which looked very prettily—here, a pasture with numberless sheep on it all cleanly cropped from the late shearing, among which the young lambs were beheld making excellent sport with each other, or running with an innocent plaintive "ba" to the mother ewe, whose deeper voice ever and anon came in with a pleasant harmony—there, a field partly ploughed by a team of oxen, followed by a choice company of rooks, who came to make prey of the worms that were turned up in the furrows—and not a stone's throw from them was a man scattering of seed in the newly raised soil—whilst close at hand were sundry old people busily engaged at weeding a coming crop. Other fields, of various different tints, stretched themselves out far and wide, till nought could be seen but the hedge rows; and the far off hills and woods, the greenness whereof seemed to vanish in the distance to a deep dark blue.

Nothing of all this brave sight was noticed by Master Buzzard, who rode on his horse with a tercel on his wrist, and a brach-hound at his horse's heels, careless of all things in nature save only his own selfish schemings and villanous plottings against the happiness of others. He was one for whom the beauties around him had no attractions at any time, unless, peradventure, it afforded him good sport in hawking or in such other pastimes as he took delight; in fact, from a riotous, headstrong youth, he had grown to be a man void of all principle, seeking his own pleasures, heedless of whatsoever might be in their way; and never hesitating to stoop to any villany that promised employment to his bad passions, and advantage to himself. Such a one Nature might look in the face, smiling in all her most exquisite comeliness, and he would take of her no more heed than would he the squalid lineaments of a beggar's callet. Indeed, the numberless moving graces of our inestimable kind mother, can only be sufficiently appreciated by those whose eyesight is free from sensual and selfish films, and whose deep hearted love helpeth their vision more admirably than can any glasses, however magnifying they may be.

Master Buzzard proceeded on his journey at a briskish amble, seemingly, by the contraction of his brows, and unpleasing gravity of his aspect, to be meditating somewhat; but of what he was thinking I care not to tell; for it is a standing truth, a bad man's thoughts will do good to none. Sometimes he would start from his reflections to whistle to his hound, should the dog seem inclined to wander away upon the fresh trail of coneys or hares; and then swear a lot of terrible oaths when she returned to his side; or he would walk his horse, to talk and trifle with his hawk; and then, tired of that, away he would bound again, through the deep lanes, and over the fields, to Charlcote, with his dog some little way behind, carrying of her nose close to the ground, or running on before with a sharp quick bark, constantly stopping and twirling of her head round to look back at her master; and away again, as though it was fine sport to her to be so early a roving. Thus they went till they came to a white gate, at the which Master Buzzard was forced to dismount to open it, and then rode on again through a pasture marked by sweeping undulations, dotted here and there with magnificent oaks and beeches, through which the sunshine came in glances, in a manner as if desirous of having the best aspects of this sylvan scene.

Here the palfrey ambled his prettiest paces, for the close herbage was as velvet to his hoofs, and he stretched out his neck, and shook his mane, and pawed the ground as he went, in a marvellous fine fashion: but all at once he stopped of a sudden, for right across his path, a little in advance of him, there rushed a numerous troop of deer, and Master Buzzard had a great to do in shouting and whistling to call back his brach-hound, who at the first glance of them was for giving chase at the top of her speed. It was a famous sight to see them bounding across the wide valley, and then up the next acclivity, where they stopped,—perchance to note if they were pursued—the young fawns using their slender legs with exceeding swiftness; and amongst the rest might be seen a delicate white doe, made all the more manifest by the sleek backs of her dappled company. Farther on more of these were met with, and, if at any distance, the bucks would not stir; but with antlers erect, they would get together and examine the strangers with a marvellous bold front—anon a partridge would rise before the horse with a startling whirr; and other signs of a like nature met them as they went, which proved plain enough that they were in some goodly park or another. Peradventure, whilst Master Buzzard is making his way to Charlcote, the courteous reader will be right glad to be rid of his villanous company.

At this time Sir Thomas Lucy and his dame were taking a morning's walk in their garden and orchards—mayhap to see how looked the trees for fruit, and the ground for vegetables and flowers. These two were both of some age, that is to say, neither were short of fifty. The knight was somewhat older, of a middle size as regards length, yet his limbs were slim, and his waist no great matter. His countenance was of the simple sort, yet merry withal, for he affected a jest at times, and never failed to laugh at it the heartiest of any; but his constant affectation was of boasting what wild pranks he had done in his youth for all he was now a justice of peace; nevertheless when any offence was put upon him, he would take upon himself to be in as monstrous a rage as the greatest man in the shire. He wore a high-crowned hat a little on one side, and moved his head with a jaunty air, humming of a song he had learned when at college; and a short ruff surrounded his peaked grey beard. He wore a plum-coloured doublet, with such broad stuffed breeches to his hose as had been lately in fashion, and carried his rapier as daintily as any young gallant. As for his dame, she kept at his side with a dignity, as she imagined, becoming of her station; for as she fancied a justice of peace to be nigh upon the most worshipful of all offices, and her husband, Sir Thomas, to be the most famous justice that ever lived, any thing in her behaviour that might savour of levity she would have nought to do with—always excepting she would laugh a little at her husband's jests, as she believed in all obedience she was bound, though she never failed to cry out "fye—fye" as she did it, when they smacked of any haughtiness. In short, she was a simple honest-hearted creature as any that lived, ever ready to make up with kindness what she wanted in sense. She was dressed in an excellent stiff brocade, with a long stomacher and a notable ruff, plaited and set out in the best fashion, and wore high-heeled shoes, with gave to her walk a gravity she could not have otherwise attained; and had her own hair partly concealed under a French hood.

It may be remembered that it was this very lady of whom Master Buzzard spoke so uncivilly at William Shakspeare his christening, touching a young child she had found in her walks abandoned of its parents, and had resolved to bring it up tenderly; but in truth, all he said was a most lewd libel, as I doubt not will readily be believed of him, for she was too simple a woman to do anything unlawful, and the child was a true foundling, to whom she had shewn from the first a very womanly charity and affection. Her greatest faults were her unreasonable partialities, which blinded her completely. She could see no wrong in aught that was done by her husband, Sir Thomas, who was not altogether blameless, — or her only son, a boy of at least fifteen years, and a very tyrant to the gentle Mabel, now grown to be a child of exquisite graces of disposition, and his junior by some five or six years.

It hath already been said that the knight and his dame were taking of a morning's walk together; but some way behind these was seen a fair girl, whose clustering light ringlets were caught up by every breeze that blew, setting off as admirable a mild sweet countenance as the most innocent age of childhood ever exhibited. Behind her was a lubberly boy, dressed very daintily in doublet and hose like a young gentleman; and he was amusing himself by picking up small stones and flinging them at her, many of which hit her sore thumps; yet the only sign she shewed of her dislike of such uncivil treatment, was to beg he would not hurt her so much. These two were the poor foundling and the son of her benefactress: and this was a sample of the sort of treatment she had of him whenever he could get her away from the observation of those likely to check his rudeness; for he knew of old she would never complain of him, let his usage of her be ever so bad, and therefore he might continue it, as he thought, with perfect impunity.

"Pray you, sweet Master Thomas, hit me not so hard!" exclaimed the pretty Mabel, in such winning accents as one might have thought would have subdued a savage, as she strove unavailingly to save herself from the hard missiles with which she was pelted, by putting up her little hands, and shrinking fearfully every time a stone was thrown.

"Tut, how can I hurt thee, thou little fool?" replied young Lucy, desisting not a moment from his unmannerly behaviour.

"Indeed, you do exceedingly, else would I say nought of the matter," added she.

"Then thou shouldst have the wit to avoid my aim," said the boy with a rude laugh. "But thou makest brave sport, Mabel. O' my life, I should like to have thee fixed to a stake as cocks are at shrovetide, I warrant I'd give thee famous knocks."

"I would do you no such unkindness, believe me," answered his fair companion. "Nor would I wish to hurt any that live."

"The more fool, thou," exclaimed her tormentor.

"I marvel you should use me so uncivilly," continued the poor girl, smarting with the pain from a fresh blow. "I am sure I have done nought that should give you any displeasure, and do all you require of me at a moment's bidding, even though it may have in it a great distastefulness."

"Marry, what infinite goodness!" cried the boy in a jeering manner. "Why, of what use art, if not to afford me some sport for the lack of better? Dost not know the difference betwixt a good-for-nothing beggarly brat, and a young gentleman of worship? and what so fit, I prythee, as that the one should be the pastime of the other."

"I would rather it should be in some other fashion, an' it please you;" observed Mabel very humbly. "I will roll the ball that you should strike it, and then to my utmost speed to bring it back to you again—I will be your horse, your spaniel, your deer; nay, ought in this world you most approve of, and do all that in me lies to pleasure you, so that you give me no more cruel blows with those uncivil stones."

"'Tis my humour, I tell thee;" sharply replied the petty tyrant. "And why should I be balked in my humour by so mean a person? Thou art ever a crying out about thy hurts, forsooth; and I doubt not at all thou art no more hurt than am I."

"Nay, and indeed, sweet Master Thomas——"

"Hold thy prate!" exclaimed he, picking up another missile, somewhat larger in size than what he had previously thrown, which he caught hold of because he would not wait to seek any smaller. "See, I have got me a stone of some bigness, and if thou art not nimble, 'tis like thy crown will stand some chance of being cracked." The poor child cowed down as she saw him fling; but the blow struck hard, for a slight scream escaped her involuntarily as she hastily put up her hands to her head.

"Hang thee, why didst not take heed as I told thee!" cried the unfeeling boy, searching about as if for another stone; but it so happened that the cry of Mabel was heard by his parents, who turned back to see what caused it. The poor foundling was standing in exactly the same position as when she was struck.

"Ha! what aileth thee, Mabel?" shouted Sir Thomas, as he approached her. "Hast been stung by a bee? Well, 'tis but a small matter. But never knew I a woman yet that could not cry out lustily at trifles; nevertheless, received she any great damage that need not be told, she had the wit to hold her tongue, I warrant you."

"Fie, fie!" exclaimed the dame as usual, joining in the knight's laugh; and then resuming her customary dignity swept forward to see if there was anything amiss. "Thou shouldst not cry out, child, upon slight causes;" added she, as she came close to the poor foundling. "Bees have stings; and, as is exceeding natural, they will use them when provoked to it, and perchance thou shalt be forced to bear the smart; but come thou with me, I have in my closet the sovereignest remedy—— Alack, what a sight is this!" cried the old lady in some amazement and alarm, as, in taking the child's arm, she noticed blood trickling through her fingers, and over her waving ringlets down to her back.

"O' my life, dame, methinks she hath sufficient cause for her crying," observed the knight. "But how came this about? Dost know ought of the matter, son Tom?" enquired he, as the boy came up to the spot.

"'Troth, father, I was flinging at a bird, and mayhap struck her by chance," said his son, as he noticed the mischief he had done.

"Plague on't, why dost not take more heed?" exclaimed his father.

"I am not much hurt, I thank you;" said Mabel, but so faintly as proved she was nigh upon swooning; and indeed, the blow had been so sharp it had stunned her for a time. "And Master Thomas meant not it should strike me."

"Thou shouldst not have got in his way, child!" observed Dame Lucy very gravely. "But come with me—this wound must be looked to straight." And so saying, she led the fair child along to the house, making sage remarks all the way of the properness of little girls keeping away from places where any stones were being thrown.

"I marvel thou shouldst be so awkward, son Tom," said the knight, as he followed slowly behind the other two. "Now when I was of thy age none could match me at flinging at a mark. Many's the cock-sparrow I have knocked off his perch; nay, I have been so quick of eye as more than once, taking aim at a running leveret with a stone of less than an ounce weight, I have hit him between the ears, and tumbled him over as though he had been shot."

Thus this unmannerly boy escaped the punishment he deserved for his heartless mischief, and thus the four returned to the house, the dame intent upon dressing the child's wound, for she was famous in the knowledge of simples, and in small surgery, as all good huswifes should be; and the knight rehearsing to his son what marvellous feats he had done in his boyhood with the flinging of stones. Close upon the entrance they were met by a serving-man announcing the arrival of Master Buzzard, come to see his worship on business.

"How fare you, Master Buzzard, how fare you?" cried Sir Thomas, welcoming his visitor in the old hall, where he transacted justice business. "I must have your company to dinner, Master

Buzzard, when my dame shall do you all proper courtesies." Then unheeding ought he had to say on the matter, the old knight gave instant orders that the horse of his guest should be well tended, and preparations made for as famous a dinner as the cook could provide. "Ha! hast got a falcon?" continued he. "I doubt not 'tis a brave bird by the look of it, Master Buzzard. Indeed, in my time, I have been as cunning in falconry as the best man living. I remember me I had a hawk of my own training that was the admiration of all the country, and lords and bishops and great courtiers came to beg that bird of me, but I would part with her on no account; she went at her quarry as no bird ever did—and all of my own training. And how fareth your noble kinsman?"

"Bravely, I thank you, Sir Thomas," replied Master Buzzard courteously; and then holding out the bird, added, "this hawk is accounted one of ten thousand, as I doubt not you shall find her on trial, so I pray you accept of her, Sir Thomas, for I have had her trained so that she should be worthy of belonging to so excellent fine a judge."

"Count me your debtor, Master Buzzard," said the knight, taking the gift very readily. "I shall be proud to do you any good service, believe me. By the mass, 'tis a brave bird! And so your noble kinsman is well," continued he, as they sat together under a raised dais at the top of the hall. "I wonder if he hath forgot his old acquaintance Thomas Lucy—valiant Tom Lucy, as he was wont to call me, because once I got my head broke by a tinker for kissing of his wife. I remember me now, his good lordship laughed when the fellow offered to solder it for me for a groat, and put his irons in the fire for the purpose. That was a good jest i'faith."

"My lord often speaketh kindly of you, Sir Thomas," replied his guest, though he had never heard his kinsman mention the knight's name.

"O' my heart, doth he now!" exclaimed Sir Thomas delightedly. "Well, we have been sad boys together, that's a sure thing—such coney-catchers—such roysterers—such lads of metal were not to be found in all Oxford. We kept the college in a roar, that did we with our tricks; and if any of the citizens so much as said us nay, we would out with our toasting irons and shew them how famously we could pass the montant, the punto, the reverso, and other signs of our cunning in fence, till they were glad enough to take to their heels with whole skins. We had not our match at the duello I promise you, and my lord was as choice a man at his weapon as might be met with in those days; as for me, he would say I deserved to be fencer to the Czar of Muscovy, I was so quick at it, and that my nimbleness of motion made me as difficult to be hit as a flea with a cannon ball; odds my life, that was wittily said!"

"In truth, a notable jest;" said his guest, joining in the justice's laugh.

"And so he wears well, doth he, Master Buzzard?" enquired the knight. "I'm glad on't—heartily glad on't, for he was as true a jovial spirit as ever I have met with; and I have known some mad fellows in my-time, I warrant you. 'Troth, you would marvel famously to hear of what terrible wild doings I have been a party to in my younger days—a March hare was not so mad as was I—some called me Hector of Greece because of my valour—others the King of the Swing-bucklers, I was so ready to be a leader to the rest in any mischief. I was the terror of all the drawers round about, I would beat them so readily; and the constables of the watch have oft been heard to say they would as lief meddle with a savage bear as lay a hand on me when I was in any of my wild humours. That is a fair hound of yours," continued he, all at once noticing the dog his guest had brought with him. "There are few so apt as am I in a proper knowledge of dogs. I can tell a good one on the instant. Indeed, I have been accounted as exquisite a judge in the breeding and breaking of them as could be found in the county; and I have had in my time such dogs as could not be seen elsewhere. A fallow greyhound had I of a most choice breed that beat all she run against. O' my life, I have won such wages on that dog's head as are clean incredible. But your's is a fair hound, Master Buzzard, take my word for't."

"'Tis at your service, Sir Thomas—I brought her here with no other intent," replied the other.

"Nay, I cannot rob you of so fair a hound, Master Buzzard," said the justice, patting and commending the dog as she couched at her master's feet.

"You will do me wrong in denying me such a favour, Sir Thomas—so I pray you, take her," answered his guest.

"Nay, I should be loth to do any man wrong!" exclaimed the knight with great earnestness. "Methinks a justice of peace should be no wrong-doer—so I will e'en accept of your hound, and thank you very heartily. Is there ought in which my poor ability may do you a service, Master Buzzard?"

"There is a matter I have come upon, to the which I should like to have your worship's countenance," began his companion with a famous hypocritical serious face.

"Count upon it, Master Buzzard!" cried the justice. "Believe me, I would strain a point for you with great willingness, that would I, as I will shew at any time there is good warrant for it."

"I am much bound to you, Sir Thomas," replied the other; "then this is it. There is one John Shakspeare——"

"What, he of Stratford?" inquired the knight quickly. "A man of a fair round face, who married Arden's daughter. I have heard him well spoke of by divers of the burgesses as passing honest, and at your instigation, Master Buzzard, I will countenance him against any man."

"You have been hugely deceived in him, Sir Thomas," observed his guest very gravely.

"Marry, would he seek to deceive a justice of peace!" exclaimed the other. "What monstrous villany!"

"I have heard him speak most abominable slanders of your worship," continued Master Buzzard.

"Oh, the horrid caitiff!" cried the offended justice. "Nay, but 'tis actionable, Master Buzzard; and I will have him cast in swinging damages. O' my life, never heard I so infamous a thing! I will straightway issue my warrant for his apprehension. I will teach him to slander Sir Thomas Lucy, knight o' the shire and justice o' the peace, I warrant you! 'Tis not fit such villains should live; and methinks 'twould be exceeding proper in the law could so heinous an offence be brought in hanging."

"As I live, I am of your worship's opinion!" said his guest. "But he is a very pestilent knave, this John Shakspeare, and one of no manner of honesty whatever, as I can presently prove; for some time since, at his urgent pressing, believing him to be such creditable person as your worship thought, I lent him a hundred crowns on his bond, the which he hath not paid to this day, putting me off with all sorts of paltry excuses concerning of what losses he had had; but knowing, by certain intelligence, he was merely striving to get off payment, I have instructed Master Catchpole to proceed against him, and seize what he hath for the payment of my just debt."

"I warrant you," observed the knight, "never heard I such thorough dishonesty. What, borrow a hundred crowns at his need, and at a proper time be not able to pay it back! O' my life, 'tis clean villany!"

"Perchance I should not have been so rigorous with him, had I not heard him give your worship such ill words," added Master Buzzard; "for I care not so much for losing of such a sum; but I could not allow of one who slandered so noble a gentleman going unpunished."

"By'r lady, Master Buzzard, I am greatly beholden to you!" exclaimed the justice; "but I will trounce him famously—ay, that will I!—and keep his unruly tongue from all such lewd behaviour for ever after."

"Nay, if it please you, Sir Thomas, I would he should not be attacked in this matter," said Master Buzzard. "The burgesses might take it ill of me, he being one of the corporation, and of some influence amongst them, were I to seem to press him too hard. So I should take it kindly if you would make no stir in it; but keep you your eye upon him, and if he should be found transgressing, as it is very like he will, then, if it so please you, I shall be well content you punish him as your wisdom may think fittest."

It is only necessary to add to what hath just been set down, that Master Buzzard stayed dinner with Sir Thomas Lucy, and was well entertained of him and his lady, ever laughing at the knight's jests, and marvelling at his incredible narrations, but never failing to say something now and then which should strengthen the other's misliking of John Shakspeare, which failed not of its purpose; for the justice was so weak of conceit as to be easily enraged against any who seemed not to think of him so famously as was evident he thought of himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

It is decreed: and we must yield to fate,
Whose angry justice, though it threatens ruin,
Contempt and poverty, is all but trial
Of a weak woman's constancy in suffering.

FORD.

In felawship well could she laugh and carpe;
She was a worthy woman all hire live,
Housbondes at the chirche dore had she had five.

CHAUCER.

I exact not from you
A fortitude insensible of calamity,
To which the saints themselves have bowed, and shown
They are made of flesh and blood; all that I challenge
Is manly patience.

MASSINGER.

Hold out now,
And then thou art victorious.

FORD.

Two persons were standing in an empty chamber, bare to the very boards. A painful seriousness was on the features of each; but there was no doubting each strove to conceal from the other the exact state of their feelings. They spoke low; their voices having that subdued sound which betokened great excitement of mind, with great efforts to keep it from others' knowledge. One, a man seeming to be of the middle age, and in the prime of manhood, leaned his elbow on the window cell, with his forehead resting on his palm; the other, a woman of an admirable matronly appearance, had her arm around his waist, and her fair cheek resting upon his shoulder. These were John Shakspeare and his wife. They spoke only at intervals, in the manner described; and, as usual in all troubles, the woman appeared to be playing the part of the comforter.

"Take it not to heart, John, I pray you," said she, as she seemed to press him closer to her side. "We shall do bravely anon. We must put up with these buffets as we best may; and, for mine own part, I can content myself wondrous well, be my condition ever so humble."

"I doubt it not, dame," replied her husband; "but canst content thyself with bare lying, naked walls, and an empty larder?"

"Ay, dear heart!" answered she very readily; "for a longer space than they are like to visit us. We may be considered as poor as any that live; but whilst I have for my yoke-fellow a good husband, a tender father, and one so industriously disposed withal, as you have oft shown yourself to be, I know of no poverty that could trouble me a jot."

"But the children, dame," observed John Shakspeare in a huskish sort of voice. "Alack! what shall become of them?"

"O they will do well enough, I warrant you!" replied his wife with a cheerfulness she was far from feeling. "They can endure some slight discomfort, for they are none of mine, more especially when they take heed of their loving father's brave exertions to keep up his heart, and make head against this sudden adversity."

"I am bewildered what to set my hand to," said he, rising from his position with a countenance somewhat irresolute; "but when I look upon my stripped dwelling, and remember how delicately thou hast been brought up——"

"Tut, tut, dear heart!" exclaimed his good dame, taking one of his hands in hers, and gazing affectionately in his face; "I should scorn myself could I not bear the ills that might visit my helpmate. Think not of me, I pray you, for there liveth not in the world one so hardy as am I in all such matters." John Shakspeare shook his head mournfully as he looked on her pale face, as though he had his doubts she was as strong as she said.

"I will essay all that a man can," said he at last, "in the express hope this change of fortune will do thee no hurt, for thou hast been an excellent good wife to me, dame; and 'twould go to my heart were any evil to happen to thee." At this commendation she said never a word; but all the woman was in her eyes presently, and she suddenly threw her arms around his neck, and laid her face on his bosom.

"Woe's me, what poor foolishness is this?" cried she, rising from him a minute after, with an endeavour to look more cheerful; "but I am wonderful pleased you will try to be doing of something, and I care not what it be so that it keep sad thoughts from your head: nay, I am assured of it, you shall live prosperously the rest of your days, put you forth all your strength now to bear these troubles."

"That will I without fail, sweet heart," cried he. After a brief space he left the chamber.

Dame Shakspeare, when alone, felt the whole weight of her misfortune, for she had given such great heaps of comfort to her husband, she had not a bit of ever such smallness remaining for herself. She leaned out of the empty casement, but of the spring flowers blooming in the garden saw she nothing; she beheld only her hapless partner and her poor innocent children lacking those comforts they had been used to, and she powerless as to helping them in their need. The wife and the mother was so moved at the picture she could not avoid drawing, as to feel a sort of choking, and such heaviness of heart, that at last she dropped her face upon her hands and there smothered her sobs. All at once she caught the sound of a very sweet singing, and listening with what attention she could, heard the following words.

A COMFORTABLE CAROL.

"Cheer thee, my heart! Thy life shall have a crowning
This poor apparelling cannot beguile;
Phœbus himself hath worn as dark a frowning,
And lo! all Heaven is radiant with his smile!
Bravely thy spirit bear,
Far from each coward fear;
What though some trouble come, is all *joy* banished?
Prythee a lesson read,
In ev'ry shiv'ring weed,
That knows in winter's rage springs have not vanished.
Pleasure is born of thee, comfort is near thee,
Glory thy boon shall be—Cheer thee, O cheer thee!

Cheer thee, my heart! Heed not the present sorrow,
Let future gladness flash in ev'ry thought;
Never a night so black but hath its morrow,
Whose splendour laughs all gloominess to nought.
Though thou shouldst feel the wound,
'Tis but to plough the ground—
Looks not the soil as barren in the furrow?
Yet o'er these sightless clods,
Countless great plenty nods,
When the rich harvest clothes the wide field thorough!
Pleasure is born of thee, comfort is near thee,
Glory thy boon shall be—Cheer thee, O cheer thee!"

It was Nurse Cicely singing to the children in an upper chamber, as was her wont. It had been noted, that however much given to singing was she, she never sang any such songs as were familiar to her hearers; but she would say when spoke to on the matter, she had learned them in her youth, and knew not by whom they were writ. It was the marvel of many, that they looked to be of a higher language than ordinary ballads, whereof the tunes were the delicatest sort ever heard. Dame Shakspeare felt exceeding comforted at hearing the foregoing verses, and rising from her leaning place, hastily brushed away a tear from her eyelids, as though it was some base rebel that would needs be in arms against her authority. As she did this she was suddenly aware of a great talking of voices in what had been the warehouse, and her chamber door being presently thrown open, she beheld the whole place thronged with her neighbours, mostly women and children, carrying spare tables and chairs, and other such conveniences as they thought she stood most in need of.

"This way, neighbours, this way!" exclaimed the merry Widow Pippins, who seemed to be the leader of the party.

"Ha! dame, how dost do?" enquired she, as she put an old arm chair by the side of her. "So the villains have not left thee so much as a rush for thy floor! But mind it not, gossip, for they have given thee all the better cause for caring not a rush for the whole pack of them." Thereupon she had a hearty laugh, and then bustled herself about, giving directions where to put things, which all did with great alacrity, that presently there seemed some sort of comfort in the chamber, albeit though no two chairs were alike.

Mistress Malmsey and Mistress Dowlas were each at the side of Dame Shakspeare, for she was more overpowered by the kindness of her neighbours than ever she had been at the great reverse she had just experienced; and they two having got her seated, were pressing of her to take some wine the vintner's wife had brought with her, and were bestowing on her all sorts of friendly consolation.

"Now, get you gone, all of you, and let us see which hath the best pair of heels," said the widow, in her cheerfulest humour, to the others. "Mayhap, if you search thoroughly, you shall still find some odd thing or another serviceable to our good neighbour; and methinks 'twould be infamous of any who have wherewithal to spare, to keep it from one who is in such need."

"Ay, that would it," said David Hurdle, who had run from his work on the news of John Shakspeare's misfortune, with a heavy oak table nigh as much as he could carry.

"Methinks I have a knife or two, and mayhap a spare trencher," observed Mother Flytrap. "But, alack! what a monstrous shame was it to have been so hard upon so sweet a woman. Odds codlings! I could find it in my heart to do them a mischief for't.".

"Use thy legs briskly, and thy tongue shall last the longer," exclaimed the Widow Pippins, merrily.

"That will I, I warrant you!" replied the old woman, hobbling along with her stick at a rate she had not attempted for many a day.

"As I live, the world groweth more villanous every hour!" cried Oliver Dumps, putting on one of his dolefullest faces. "What abominable uncivilness and horrible tyranny is this—what shameful usage and intolerable cruelty!"

"Fine words butter no parsnips, Master Constable," said the widow. "Hast brought any useful thing for our good neighbour?"

"Nay, I clean forgot," answered Oliver.

"Speed thee, then, and give handsomely," exclaimed she. "What dost come here for, with thy melancholy visage, like that of a frog in a long drought? Get thee gone for a good dozen of trenchers, else if ever I draw thee a drop of my liquor again, call me a horse. And, prythee," added the merry woman, as he was moving himself off, "strive if thou canst not find a good store of wholesome victual to put in them; and count on brimming measure from me the rest of thy life."

"How now, sweetheart," cried she, when there were no others left with Dame Shakspeare save only herself, Mistress Malmsey, and Mistress Dowlas, "be not so downcast. By my patience, there is nought in this you should so much care for. Look at me, who have buried five husbands—seem I in any way woe-begone? O'my life, no! Perchance I should seem none the less satisfied had I buried a hundred, for there would still be plenty as good above ground, or I am hugely mistaken. Troth, care and I have never been bedfellows, that's a sure thing."

"An' it please you, dame, I will take the boy William to our house till things are more settled than they now are," observed the draper's wife.

"And I will move my Timothy to be a mean for setting your good man on his legs again," said the other, as affectionately.

"I heartily thank you," was all Dame Shakspeare could say in reply.

"Prythee look a little more cheerful," cried the widow. "Smile a bit now—'twould do you wonderful good, I warrant; and a famous burst of laughing would be worth any money to you."

Their attention was, at this moment, attracted by some loud talking in the adjoining chamber or warehouse, which proved to be Master Buzzard's man, Saul, conducting of himself with intolerable insolency toward John Shakspeare, evidently with a view of provoking him to some breach of the peace.

"Humph!" exclaimed he, carelessly beating of his boot with an ashen stick he had with him, as he stared about the naked chamber with exceeding impudence, "methinks thy wits must needs take to wool-gathering, to help thee to a new stock, else must thy customers lack serving, for here is as goodly a shew of nothing as ever I saw."

"Get thee gone, fellow!" observed John Shakspeare, with that indifference an honest man ever feels at the insults of a low villain.

"Fellow!" cried Saul, sharply, "who dost call fellow, I prythee? I have a few pounds, at least, stored up, with a something in my purse to spend; but that thou art worth a pinch of salt with all thou hast, is more than I can see any colour of warrant for thinking. Marry, I marvel to hear beggars give their betters ill words."

"Wilt get thee gone?" cried the other, in a louder key; "what dost want here? Say thy business, and be off."

"Business, 'quotha!" exclaimed the man, with a sneering laugh, "O' my life, this be a rare place for business. What hast got to sell, John Shakspeare—spiders' webs? I'faith, 'tis like thou wilt drive a brave trade anon, provided thou canst keep up a fair demand for such merchandise."

"O' my world, if thou dost not take thyself quietly out of my dwelling in a presently, I will turn thee out," said John Shakspeare, determinedly.

"Ha, indeed," replied the fellow, twirling his stick about, and eyeing his companion superciliously from head to foot, "an' I be not hugely mistaken, 'twould take a somewhat better man than thou art, to do any such thing."

"Away, fellow! thou art contemptible," exclaimed the other, making great efforts to withhold his anger; "an' I were but half as vile a wretch as thou, I would take me a rope and hang myself without another word."

"How darest thou call names, thou pitiful, beggarly wretch!" cried Saul, approaching his companion with a savage menacing look. "Dost think to play the high bailiff again? 'Slife! hear I any more of thy bouncing speech, I'll crack thy crown for thee."

"Wouldst!" exclaimed John Shakspeare, seizing the fellow so suddenly by the collar of his jerkin, that he had no time for putting of his threat in execution. "Wouldst, caitiff!" continued he, shaking him in his strong grasp till he appeared to have shook all his breath away. Then drawing him close to his breast, he thrust his insulter from him with such force, that he sent him reeling to the other end of the chamber, saying, "Get thee gone for a villain!"

As soon as the man got his footing, he was for flying at the other in a horrible deadly rage, to do him some mischief, when he was stopped by the Widow Pippins, Mistress Malmsey, and Mistress Dowlas, rushing in before him from out of the adjoining chamber.

"Away, thou scurvy rogue!" exclaimed the widow.

"Get thee hence, thou pitiful rascal, or I will clout thy head off!" cried the vintner's wife, with no less earnestness.

"By my troth, an' thou stayest here another minute, I'll be as good as hanging to thee, thou intolerable villain!" added Mistress Dowlas, in as great a rage as either.

"Go to, thou art a drab!" said Saul, impudently, as he tried to push by them.

"Am I a drab, fellow?" exclaimed Mistress Malmsey, hitting of him a box on the ear with all the strength of her arm.

"Dost call me drab, villain!" cried the draper's wife, giving him so sore a one on the other side of his head that it nearly turned him round.

"I'll drab thee!" said the widow, lifting up her foot the next moment, and giving him a kick behind of such force it sent him some paces; and the three women followed him up with such vigour, that after standing a moment, quite bewildered with the quickness and fierceness of their blows, the fellow was fain to take to his heels: but not before the widow had given him a parting benediction with her foot, in the use of which she shewed a marvellous cleverness—that gave him a good start to begin with.

"As I live that was well done of us!" exclaimed the merry widow, as soon as Saul had disappeared, and laughing with her usual free-heartedness; "never knew I so goodly a foot-ball, or ever played so famous a game. Indeed, 'twas exquisite sport. I would not have missed my share in it for another husband. O' my life, an' he findeth himself comfortable sitting for the next month, he must be rarely fashioned. He must needs forswear chairs, and rest as gingerly on a stool as would a cow upon broken bottles. I'faith, 'twas rare sport!"

The other two appeared to be nearly as well amused, as they returned to Dame Shakspeare, who had come as far as the door in some alarm, when her neighbours burst into the warehouse; but there were two others, who had observed Saul's insolence from the kitchen, and these were Maud and Humphrey, and were quite as much moved at it as any there. The former had been crying ever since the seizure, and the other had been endeavouring, with a vast shew of awkward affectionateness, to give her some comfort.

"Humphrey!" cried she, suddenly jumping up from the ground where she had been sitting, at hearing of her master so insulted, and gazing on her companion with a very monstrous earnestness; "An' thou dost not go and cudgel that knave within an inch of his life, I'll forswear thy company. Ay," added she, with a most moving emphasis; "though I die a maid for't!"

"By goles, thou shalt never do so horrid a thing!" exclaimed Humphrey, hastily catching hold of a cudgel that had often done good service on himself, and darting out at the back door as Saul made his exit at the front. Now Humphrey was not much given to valour: indeed, to speak the exact truth, he could be terrible fearful upon occasions; but what will not love do? All at once Humphrey felt himself a hero; and to save his Maud from so unnatural a catastrophe as she had threatened, he would that moment have dared any danger, had it been ever so great. As he proceeded quickly along, he threw out his arms, jerked up his head, expanded his chest, and flourished his cudgel, with the air of a conqueror. No one knew Humphrey. I doubt hugely Humphrey knew himself, he was so changed.

Saul left John Shakspeare's house in a terrible bad humour, as may be supposed. His head seemed to spin like a parish top, and as for ——but methinks the courteous reader needeth no retrospective allusions. Suffice it to say he was in a tearing passion, and went his way monstrous chapfallen, muttering all sorts of imprecations, with his eyes on the ground as though intent on studying every pebble he trod on. All at once some one ran against him with such force as nearly to send him off his legs.

"A murrain on thee! dost want thy fool's head broke?" shouted Saul.

"Ay, marry, and why not, if thou canst do it!" replied Humphrey in a big voice that almost frightened himself. "Go and bite thy thumb at a stone wall, and be hanged to thee! My head be as good a fool's head as thine, I warrant; and I care not who knows it. I tell thee I take thee to be a scurvy villain; so have it in thy teeth, thou coal-carrying knave!"

"Bravely said, Humphrey!" cried a neighbour, astonished at such a display in one so little noted for valour.

"Well done, my heart of oak!" exclaimed another, patting him on the back with the same commending spirit.

"Why, thou pitiful worsted knave!" bawled out Master Buzzard's man, recovering from his surprise at being so abused of so mean a person. "'Slife! an' I do not beat thee to shavings, I am a Jew."

"A ring, my masters—a ring!" bawled out another; and very speedily there was a circle of some twenty men and boys, formed round the two combatants. Never were two persons so badly matched. Saul was the best cudgel-player in the whole country; but all Humphrey's knowledge of it came of the blows he had had of his master, and not without deserving it; yet was Humphrey the favourite of the spectators beyond question, all of whom held the other in huge dislike, for very efficient causes, and Humphrey was so encouraged and commended of them, that although his feelings were somewhat of a dubious sort, for all the shew he made, it kept up his valour famously. Presently the two began playing of their weapons very prettily; but Humphrey was in so monstrous an eagerness to pay his antagonist, he did nothing but strike away as hard as he could, in a manner that quite confused the practised cudgel-player. Saul was in a horrible passion, which in conjunction with other things, mayhap might have made his skill avail him so little; but when he found his head broke, and heard the shouts of triumph of those around him, he became like a mad beast, and struck out wherever he could at mere random. Certes Humphrey got no lack of thumps; but his head looked to be of the hardness of a bullet, and gave no sign of being touched, while Saul could scarce see out of his eyes for the blood running from his broken head.

As it was now a mere trial of endurance it was easy to see who would get the best of it, for Saul might have cudgelled a post with as much sign of success as he had with his present antagonist; and nothing could exceed the gratification of all present at the heartiness with which John Shakspeare's man gave it the other. In short, Saul got such a drubbing as he had never had since he was born; and at last, when his strength was nearly exhausted, a sharp blow sent him to the ground like a stone. Then rose a shout of triumph such as Stratford had rarely heard, and Humphrey, mounted on the shoulders of two butchers' apprentices, and followed by half the town hurraing him as he went—they were in such delight he had behaved himself so valorously, and punished as he deserved so notorious a knave—was carried like a hero to his master's dwelling.

"Maud!" cried the victor, as he entered the back door, with his heart swelling with exultation.

"Well, Humphrey," said she.

"I have given that varlet his deserts."

"Hast?" added she, approaching him closely, and looking earnestly into his face.

"By goles, I do think I have gone as nigh killing the knave as was possible."

"Hast?" repeated she with a smile breaking over her chubby cheeks. "Then here's at thee!" Thereupon she suddenly seized Humphrey by his two ears with her huge fists, and gave him as hearty a buss as ever man received of woman since the world commenced.

CHAPTER IX.

Mosca. There's nought impossible.
Volpone. Yes, to be learned, Mosca.
Mosca. O no; rich
Implies it. Hood an ass with reverend purple,
So you can hide his two ambitious ears,
And he shall pass for a cathedral doctor.
BEN JONSON.

Withouten bake mete never was his hous,
Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous,
It snewed in his hous of mete and drinke,
Of all deinties that men coud thinke,
After the sondry sesons of the yere.
CHAUCER.

Of an old English gentleman who had an old estate,
And kept up his old mansion at a bountiful rate,
With an old porter to relieve the poor at his gate,
Like the Queen's old courtier, and a courtier of the Queen's.
OLD BALLAD.

IT cannot be supposed William Shakspeare was well off in his schooling under so ill a master as Stripes, who, though he did not treat him uncivilly, in token of such welcome gifts as his mother ofttimes brought, was of too ignorant pedantic a nature to have that heed which a young scholar of any promise requireth: nevertheless William took to his book very kindly, to the wonderful admiration of Dame Shakspeare and her gossips, and in especial of Nurse Cicely, which never failed to bring forth notable prophecies of his future greatness from her, whereof more than one person entertained them as exceeding credible. There was no wake, or lamb-ale, or other festival in the neighbourhood the boy was not invited to with his mother, at which he was continually called upon to repeat such verses he had learned of his mother, or sing such ballads as his nurse had made him familiar with; and the goodly manner he would perform what was required, so won upon the hearts of the spectators, that praises out of all number, and other things more substantial in great plenty, were the sure consequences. As soon as he had learned to read, wonderful was the diligence with which he perused all manner of books—albeit he quickly exhausted the poor stock that could be had for his reading, for these merely consisted of a few volumes, chiefly poems of Dame Shakspeare's, and one or two here and there of some neighbour. Certes, no great matter of knowledge was to be gained of such books; but they served to excite the young mind, and keep it in a restless yearning for more delectable food; and therefore were not entirely unprofitable.

It is not to be imagined that a child so disposed took no delight in the proper pastimes of his age; for the entire contrary is nighest to the truth. Among all his schoolfellows, who entered into any sport with such absolute zest as Will Shakspeare? He was the wildest of any. His free spirit made such play among them as soon gained for him the liking of the whole school. He grew up at last to be the chief leader in their games—the captain of their exploits, and the very heart and principle of all their revels. If Will was not of their company, doubtless were they as much at a loss as a hive of bees without their queen: but when they were heard as merry as crickets by a winter's hearth, calling lustily to each other, crowding here and running there, sending the football bounding along the grass, or leaping over each other's backs as though they had wings, of a surety he was to be found amongst the very foremost. But it should be borne in mind that there were times, and many times too, when the day was in its freshest glory, and every one of his companions were enjoying themselves to his heart's content, he would be in some out-of-the-way corner, half sitting, half reclining on the floor, leaning deeply studious over some old volume he had provided himself with: and the merry shoutings close at hand, or the pressing entreaties of those he most liked, had never power to draw him thence till he had gone through it every page.

More than once too, when they were out together a maying, or nutting in the woods, he would stray from the rest, perchance led away by the sweet singing of the birds, or the delicate beauty of the blossoms; and in some shady place would sit him down to rest, conning of a book the whilst, which he had carried under his jerkin, till somehow or another he would fall asleep,—and O the exquisite pleasant dreams he had at that time! At the end he would suddenly start up, rubbing of his eyes and looking in every place for the great multitude of the fairy folk, who a moment since, in their delicate finery, seemed to be dancing so bravely before him, and singing to him such admirable choice ditties, and doing him all manner of delectable courtesies; but finding no sign of such, searched he ever so, he would be in huge disappointment, till the shouting of his fellows woke him from his strange bewilderment; and he would then make what haste he could to rejoin his company.

Of his disposition, it is not too much to say it savoured of as much sweetness as ever laid in so little a compass. There was no aptness to sudden quarrel with him—no giving of ill words—no beating of lesser boys than himself—no tendency to mere rude mischief; neither selfishness, nor covetousness, nor revengefulness, nor any unmannerly quality whatsoever, such as are frequent in other boys; but he would give freely of what he had, and assist those in their tasks who were backward, and very cheerfully do any civil thing for another that was in his compass, and could not bear to see any cruelty, or tyranny, or unkind treatment of any sort, let it be among big or little. From this it will readily be conceived that for his master he had but small affection, even though Stripes used him with more civilness than was his wont to others. This seeming partiality, however, lasted only as long as Dame's Shakspeare's gifts; for when the family grew to be too poorly off to send him any, the schoolmaster shewed his savage humour to him as much as to the rest.

At the complete poverty of his father by Master Buzzard's ruthless proceedings, it was thought William would be taken altogether from school to assist his parents in such things as he could, for he was now grown to be of some bigness, and John Shakspeare had not withal to keep either Maud or Humphrey—who straightway made themselves of the pale of matrimony—and was striving as he best might to do a little trade as a glover, whereof his means, with his neighbours' assistance, was only enough to accomplish: but it was resolved by the two aldermen's wives, who were the prime movers of all things in his behalf, that it would be best, as he was getting so forward, William should keep school hours, and assist his father at other times; and in consequence, he continued to receive such instructions as Stripes could give in reading and writing, the science of simple arithmetic, and the study of the Latin grammar, for some time longer, wherein he got to be the very head of the school, despite of having so unworthy a teacher, and of the monstrous negligence and wanton insolency with which he was treated.

Now, this fellow of a schoolmaster was in the habit of using his boy Dickon, worse than any turnspit dog might be treated by a brutal scullion. What his wages were has never been known; and indeed, save in the way of blows, he never had anything of the sort. He got such little victual, that it was supposed of some he would long since have taken to eating of himself, only he knew not where to find a mouthful. Truly, flesh and blood could not stand such usage; indeed, it appeared as though they had long had nought to do with the business, leaving skin and bone to manage every thing between them. Dickon was reduced to such a strait, that if he caught sight of a cur looking for bones, he would take to his heels presently, with the full conviction the animal would make a grab at him an' he got in his way. In him, however, such leanness was but the natural result of poor living; but his master, though he eat and drank greedily whatever he could lay his hand on, looked not a jot more full of flesh than ordinary. Indeed, he starved both his boy and his cat, eating from them their share of victual, yet seemed to carry nigh upon as hungry a look with him as either. His tyrannical humour he often enough shewed upon his scholars, but this was nothing to be compared with the savageness with which he was ever falling upon poor Dickon for any trifling faults; and it was his custom, when he fancied there was anything amiss in the poor boy's behaviour, to drag him into the school-room, to be horsed by the biggest of his scholars; and then he would lay on him with a great rod, with such fierceness as was horrible to see, caring not a jot for his cries, or the entreaties of the whole school he should be let go.

These exhibitions of his master's cruelty were intolerable to William Shakspeare, and many of his schoolfellows; so one day, after such a sight, he got several of them together he had confidence in, and they being moved with wrath and indignation, resolved amongst themselves would allow of it no longer, no matter what might follow;

and the first class, which were the chiefest for strength, entered into a bond of mutual protection. Others of the greatest spirit were drawn into the confederacy, and in a little time the whole school was in a ferment upon the matter. The very smallest of the lot was seen to double up his little fist, with a look of vengeance that spoke volumes of meaning. All things, however, were left to the management of Will Shakspeare, and every one vowed to stand by him, though they were whacked to ribbons. The secret was well kept. Stripes had not the slightest knowledge of any such feeling against him, and the next day rushed into the school-room, hawling in Dickon by the ear, who was making of a pitiful lamentation, and cuffing him mercilessly by the way.

"Will Shakspeare!" shouted the schoolmaster; "horse me this villain straight." The boy moved not an inch.

"Will Shakspeare, I say!" thundered Stripes, with increased rage; "horse me this caitiff, I tell thee." Still his scholar kept the same unmovedness, and every one appeared studying of their tasks with more than ordinary diligence, nevertheless their little hearts were a beating famously.

"Why, thou villain, what dost mean by this?" exclaimed the pedagogue, furiously, letting go his hold of Dickon, and catching up his cane. "I'll make thee hear, I warrant." In the twinkling of an eye every boy was out of his form.

"Now, Tom Greene!" cried one.

"Now, Jack Hemings!" shouted another.

"At him, Dick Burbage!" exclaimed a third.

"On him, Harry Condell!" bawled a fourth; and, in an instant, there was a rush upon the astonished schoolmaster from all parts of the school.

"Ha! dost rebel?" screamed he, making furious efforts to cut them with his cane, with his cadaverous visage livid with passion. "'Slight, I'll make thee rue it!"

But for all his terrible efforts he was speedily overpowered. The boys came upon him with all the spirit of ants disturbed in their nest; some clung to a leg, others to an arm. They jumped upon his neck, and hung upon his jerkin in such numbers, that he could do nought in the world but threaten them with the horriblest imprecations. At this stage of the proceedings, Dickon, who had regarded this sudden movement out of his wits with sheer amazement, was called to hold his back to take his master on; and though at first he shewed some sign of unwillingness, he was soon forced by the conspirators to do as they bade him.

"I'll have thee hanged, villains!" bawled the pedagogue, as he was being hoisted by the strongest of his scholars upon the backs of the poor boy he had used so inhumanly, malgre all his strugglings and fumings. "I'll lash the skin off thy pestilent bones! I'll scourge every one of thee to death. Let me go, thou vile wretches!"

"Hold on, Dickon!" cried some.

"Keep him fast, my masters!" exclaimed others, and shouts of encouragement arose from all. Dickon did hold fast, doubtless in some slight pleasure, for all his seeming unwillingness, and he had no lack of helpers in his office; so that Stripes was very speedily prepared for that punishment he had with so little discretion inflicted upon others. As soon as he began to be aware of what was intended for him, he was like one in a phrenzy. Mad with fear, rage, and indignation, he redoubled his threats and his struggles, but all to small profit; for, whilst he was held down as firm as in a vice by some, others, one after another, laid into him with all their might till he roared for mercy. These, then, taking the places of his holders, divers in their turn assisted in the tyrant's punishment, till not one of the whole school but had repaid him with interest the undeserved blows he had received at his hands. To describe the joy with which all this was done by the scholars, their uproarious shouts and cheers, or the horrible bad humour of their master, is clean out of the question. I doubt not it will be imagined of many. The end was, at a signal he was dropped on the floor, so completely tamed of his tyrannical humours, he would not have struck at a mouse,—where he was left to put himself to rights as he might,—and then the whole school took their leaves of him very orderly.

The next day they came to school as usual, but all in a body; the bigger boys first, and the little ones coming after, and every one went to his place, and took to his studies, as if nothing had happened out of the ordinary. Doubtless, they had come to a resolution to have at him again, shewed he any more of his insufferable cruelties; but there was small need of any such a thing, for there was never so altered a man seen as was Stripes, the schoolmaster. He heard them their lessons with a sort of suavity that was marvellous beyond all things—praising of every one as though he had got for his scholars such prodigies of genius as could not be met with elsewhere—and taking no more thought of canes and rods, than if such things had never been in his experience. As for Dickon, he shewed his master a fair pair of heels directly he had him off his back, and was shortly after taken into the service of an honest yeoman, father to one of the scholars.

It so happened, once on a time, as William Shakspeare and his chief companions were strolling together, they came upon the town crier giving note to the inhabitants, that my Lord of Leicester's players being in the town, would perform a play at a certain hour, to the which the citizens were invited at a small charge. This put some of them in a monstrous desire to behold so goodly an entertainment—particularly William Shakspeare, who had beheld nought of the kind in all his life; but others, his elders, had seen plays more than once, and they gave him such moving accounts of what exquisite pleasant pastime was to be found in them, that he did nothing but wish he could get to a sight of such. Unluckily, he had no money of any kind; and his father's necessities were so great he knew none could be spared him. What to do he knew not; for though he could get standing room for a penny, no sign of a penny could he see anywhere. He knew that divers of his schoolfellows were intent upon going, and he would have been glad enough to have joined them, but he saw no hope of the kind, by reason of wanting the necessary price of admission. It however did so turn out, that the father of one of the boys was an especial acquaintance of the head of the players, by which means Richard Burbage not only got to see the play for nothing, but moved his father to allow of his schoolfellow, Will Shakspeare, having the like permission; which, to the latter's extreme comfort, was granted.

The players gave their entertainment in the inn yard of the Widow Pippins, on a raised platform in front of the gallery. They were not troubled with scenery, and made no particular display of a wardrobe, but the merry interlude, called "Gammer Gurton's Needle," a huge favourite at that time, which was then and there played by them, required little such accompaniment. The spectators, at least the greater number, stood in the yard; but those who chose to pay more, were accomodated with seats at the gallery and casements. William Shakspeare, by going early with his fellows, got a front place, and waited, in a marvellous eagerness, to see the interlude. Presently there was a movement made by his neighbours, which caused him to turn round like the rest, and he saw it was occasioned by the entrance into the gallery of Sir Thomas Lucy, his lady, and his son, who took the best places; elsewhere were seen Mistress Malmsey and Mistress Dowlas, in their choicest finery, pointing out their acquaintances to each other; and either up or down, half the good folks of Stratford might have been recognised, intent upon nothing so much as seeing the play.

At last the curtain was moved, and a beginning was made of the play by the appearance of Hodge and Deacon. The pitiful manner in which the one complains to the other of the bad state of his lower garment, and the right doleful way of his companion's condolences on the matter, were received by the audience with loud roars of laughter. Then, when Deacon acquaints Hodge of Gammer Gurton and her maid Tib having been by the ears together, making of the house a perfect Bedlam, and the other protests he was monstrous afraid something serious would happen, having taken note of the awful manner in which Tom Tankard's cow frisked her tail, there was no less mirthfulness. Upon Hodge proceeding homewards and meeting with Tib, and hearing that all this turmoil has been occasioned by the Gammer losing of her needle; when upon spying of Gib, the cat, up to the ears in her milkbowl, she let fall his breeches she was clouting with all diligence, the humour of dialogue seemed equally well relished. But when it came to Gammer Gurton's terrible to do because of her loss, her monstrous anxiousness to recover it, her suspicions of the honesty of her neighbours, her intrigues and quarrels with them, and the interference of no less a person than the parson of the parish, Dr. Rat, to make peace again, there was choice roaring, I warrant you; and this was only exceeded when Hodge, upon sitting of himself down, discovered the lost needle, to his great smart, in consequence of its having been left sticking in his rent garment.

I doubt much whether the finest play ever writ, was so well relished of an audience as was this rude coarse interlude, of the simple burgesses of Stratford. Even Sir Thomas Lucy laughed as though he would never have done. As for William Shakspeare, it made such impression on him, never having seen any thing of the sort, that the next day, and very often after, he was to be seen, with his companions Burbage, Greene, Condell, and Hemings, making players of themselves in an out-of-the-way corner of the town, essaying to play that very interlude, by one taking one character, and the rest others; and it was said by some who saw them at it, that the seeing of these boys aping the players out of their own heads, as they did, was nigh upon as rare a sight as seeing the players themselves. All these five were ever at it; and the playing of Gammer Gurton's Needle took the place of all other sports whatsoever. Suffice it to say, that the Earl of Leicester's company got such reception, they repeated their visits frequently; and young Burbage's father having shewn some talent as a player, they took him to be of their company.

On one occasion, William Shakspeare was sent with some gloves to a certain Sir Marmaduke de Largesse, living at Wilnecott, at an excellent old mansion there, who delighted in keeping up the country sports and festivals, and was noted for miles round, what extreme pleasure he took in any thing that smacked of antiquity. His hospitality was unbounded, and his table was ever loaded with the choicest of good victual, to which all might seat themselves according to their quality; and what was left was given to the poor by the porter at the gate. No one ever came there hungry that did not leave with as much as he liked to eat and drink, under his belt; and, if it was needed, a something in his purse to carry him along. In his cooking he was more careful there should be a good plenty of wholesome viands, than that any shew of extreme niceness should be visible in the dishes; and as for what he gave to drink, it was chiefly honest ale, of his own brewing, of such fine flavour and strength as was not to be matched, go where you would.

Having passed through an avenue of lofty trees, which led up to the house, admiring as he approached it its fair appearance and antique character, on making known his errand he was ushered by a jolly-looking butler into a spacious stone-floored chamber, lighted with transome windows, the walls of which were garnished with a prodigal assortment of corstlets and helmets arranged in rows, with coats of mail, military jerkins or shirts of leather, halberts, bucklers, pikes, bills, crossbows, and all manner of the like weapons and defences. An oak-table that went the whole length of the chamber was covered with smoking viands, brimming black jacks, and full trenchers. The upper and lower messes being divided by a huge saltcellar,—all around was a busy company of friends and retainers, doing honour to the feast; and at the head of the table in a famous tall chair, sat a ruddy, stout, pleasant faced gentleman, with hair and beard white and plentiful; a full ruff such as might have been in fashion some score of years since, and a serviceable doublet, with trunks and hose of a sober colour. The hilt of his rapier came up to his breast, but he held it as carefully as if it had been an old friend, and I doubt not would sooner have gone without his napkin at his meals, than without so approved a companion. He kept discoursing cheerfully with those nighest him, ever and anon glancing his eyes round to see that the carver did his duty, and that all were well served. This was Sir Marmaduke de Largesse.

William Shakspeare had not entered the hall many minutes ere he was spied by the old knight, who in a kind voice bade him come near and state his business.

"Gloves, eh!" exclaimed he pleasantly, upon hearing of his errand. "Hie then to a seat at the table—get thee a good meal and a fair draught—after that if thou art in the humour, come to me and I will attend thy business with all proper diligence."

There was such sweetness in the behaviour of this old gentleman, that it was impossible for the boy hesitating to do what he was desired, even had he cared not to be of the feast, so he went with due deference below the salt, where place was cheerfully made for him, and every one of his neighbours commenced pressing of him to this and the other tempting dish with such cordiality, as soon put him quite at home with them. A trencher full of excellent fare, he quickly found smoking at his hand so enticingly, that he was fain to set to with exceeding good will, and it was a truly pleasant part of the entertainment to note the anxiousness of his neighbours, that he should have what he liked best, and as much of it as he could fancy. In all honesty he made a famous meal, and after drinking sparingly of the ale, he was ready to attend to his errand. Presently a most thankful grace was said by the chaplain, and in a few minutes the tables were cleared, and all had gone their several ways, save only some guests who kept their places, and continued conversing with their bountiful kind entertainer. William Shakspeare did not move, for he was waiting for some sign from the knight of his being at leisure.

"Prythee let me hear that ballad of William the Conqueror, thou wert speaking of, Master Peregrine," said Sir Marmaduke to a curious sort of pantaloon looking person, wearing a huge pair of spectacles, mounted on his peaked nose.

"O' my life, I doubt hugely I can say but a verse or two," replied Master Peregrine, in a thin small voice. "I heard it when I was a boy, and never since, nor have I met it in print any where, though I have searched wherever there was likelihood of its being to be found. Indeed I would give something to know it thoroughly, for I doubt not 'tis exceeding ancient, and one of the very rarest ballads that ever were made."

"Let us hear what of it is in your remembrance, I pray you," exclaimed the chaplain, who was one with a venerable worthy aspect, and was then employed in brewing a cup of sack for the old knight and his guests, in the which he was esteemed famous.

"Well said, Sir Johan," said a young gallant, a near kinsman to Sir Marmaduke. "I love an old ballad as well as any."

"Thou lovest a pretty woman better of the two, Sir Valentine, I'll warrant," cried a companion merrily.

"That doth he, Sir Reginald, I'll be sworn, or he is none of my blood," replied the old knight in the same humour.

"Well, I care not to deny the impeachment," answered his kinsman with a smile. "Doubtless I can con either upon occasion, and get them by heart too if they be worthy."

"Marry, and very properly," cried Sir Marmaduke, and then, with a famous arch look, added, "I doubt though you would like to have your pretty woman as old as your ballad—eh, nephew?"

"No, by St. Jeronimo!" exclaimed Sir Valentine with such emphasis, it raised a laugh all around.

"Well, give me an old ballad for my money," cried Master Peregrine with a marvellous complacency. "Methinks there is nothing like the delicate pleasure it affordeth, if so be you stick it on the wall with some of its fellows, and go to the perusal of it when you have a mind."

"There the ballad hath it hollow," observed Sir Johan gravely, yet with a twinkle in his eye that savoured of some humour. "Being of the church, perchance I am not the fittest to speak on so light a matter, but in all my philosophy, I know not of ever a pretty woman who allowed herself to be stuck on the wall with her fellows, were it even for a single moment." This sally also occasioned great laughing, after which Master Peregrine was pressed for his ballad.

"It is of some length," said he; "and if I remember me right, is writ in three separate fyttes or divisions."

Then each of the company listened with courteous attention, Master Peregrine commenced repeating of the verses he had spoken of.

"I regret my memory faileth me in the rest of the verses, for I doubt not they would be found well worthy of a hearing," said the antiquary, suddenly coming to a halt.

"Think awhile—mayhap they shall return to your remembrance," said the chaplain.

"Ay, do, Master Peregrine; for I should be loath to lose any part of so goodly a ballad," added the old knight, who, with the rest, appeared to take infinite interest in it.

"Nay, as I live, I know not a verse more," replied the other, seemingly in some vexation when he found his thinking was to no profit. "Indeed, I should be heartily glad could I meet with the other parts, for they are of a very singular curiousness."

"'Ifaith, I should be well pleased myself to hear the rest on't," remarked Sir Marmaduke, and his guests spoke much to the same purpose.

"An' it please your worship, methinks I can give you every line of it," said young William Shakspeare, who had fidgetted about some time without daring to speak.

"Ha, Gloves! art there?" exclaimed the old knight, merrily; "in very truth I knew not of thy presence. Come hither, I prythee."

"Dost indeed know aught of it, young sir?" inquired Master Peregrine, looking at the boy earnestly through his spectacles, as he approached him.

"Every word, an't please you," replied William.

"Let us hear of it then, and quickly," cried Sir Marmaduke, putting his hand kindly on the boy's head. William Shakspeare saw all eyes were fixed upon him; yet there was a friendliness in every aspect which gave him nought to fear. Standing where he was, with a graceful carriage of himself, and a wonderful pleasant delivery, he presently went on with the verses.

"Bravely spoken!" exclaimed the old knight, who had observed and listened to the boy manifestly with a more than ordinary satisfaction in his benevolent pleasant aspect. "Never heard I aught more properly delivered."

"Nor I, by'r Lady," said Master Peregrine, in a similar excellent humour. "Where didst learn this exquisite ballad, young sir?"

"An' it please you, my mother taught it me," replied William Shakspeare.

"Hast any more such in thy memory?" inquired the other.

"A score at least, an' it please you," answered the boy; "most moving ones of the doings of valiant knights; and sundry of a delicater sort, concerning of the love of fair ladies; besides which I have store of fairy roundelays, that I learned of nurse Cicely, which smack most sweetly of the dainty blossoms."

"O' my life, thou art a treasure!" exclaimed Master Peregrine, in a most pleased astonishment.

"Stick him against the wall, I prythee!" cried Sir Reginald, merrily.

"Marry, methinks he is a wall of himself, or at least as good as one that is ever so well covered with ballads," remarked Sir Valentine; "you could not have fallen into more choice company, Master Antiquarian."

"So thou art John Shakspeare's son, of Stratford," said Sir Marmaduke kindly to him, after he had made the boy say something of who he was; "we must be of better acquaintance. Come thou here as often as it pleaseth thee; and if thou art for books, I have some thou wouldst be glad to be reading of, I make no manner of doubt. I tell you what, my masters," added he, turning to his guests, "I have a pleasant device in my head, which perchance may be exceedingly profitable to us all; and it is no other than to take this good boy with us to Kenilworth, to see the queen's highness, and he shall entertain us on the road with some of those rare ballads he hath spoken of."

This suggestion was heartily received by the company, and after being well commended, and received bountiful tokens of good-will from all, William Shakspeare returned home, bearing a message to his father to the effect just alluded to.

CHAPTER X.

See, she comes:
How sweet her innocence appears; more like
To Heaven itself, than any sacrifice
That can be offered to it.

MASSINGER.

I'll go hunt the badger by owl-light:
'Tis a deed of darkness.

WEBSTER.

But for to speke of vertuous beautee,
Then was she on the fairest under sonne
Ful pourely yfostered up was she:
No likerous lust was in hire herte yronne;
Ful ofter of the wel than of the tonne
She dranke, and for she wolde vertue plese,
She knew wel labour, but none idel ese.

CHAUCER.

THE next morning early there was a wonderful stir among the neighbours at noting a brave cavalcade enter Henley Street, and stop at John Shakspeare's door, and presently there came out the boy William, whom his mother had carefully dressed in his best apparel, grieving in her heart she had no better to give him, and by his father was set upon an ambling palfrey, that appeared to have been brought for him. All of his acquaintance were grouped about, marvelling famously to see Will Shakspeare riding away in the midst of persons of worship with as great an air with him as he were a lord's son. They could scarce believe their eyes; but what exquisite sweet pleasure and pardonable pride were felt by the parents, who, after their respectful salutations to the good knight and his company, at their door watched their young son as long as ever they could hold him in sight, sitting his palfrey so gallantly, he was the admiration of all who saw him. 'Faith! it was a thing to talk of for the rest of their days, and the good dame was never known to tire of it.

Away they went; Sir Marmaduke, his two kinsmen, Master Peregrine, Sir Johan the chaplain, and young William, and some half dozen of the old knight's serving-men, all on horses; and their passing along the town made the citizens come running out, and the dames were seen lifting up their babes that they might get a sight of good Sir Marmaduke. Nothing was like the respect shewn him wherever he passed, and for all he had cordial greeting, and some kind word or another. Indeed, he was held in especial esteem wherever his name was known, and few there were in the whole country who knew it not, for the old knight was a gentleman of ancestry and blood, of exceeding ancient name, and of large possessions, whereof the greater part had been possessed by his family for many generations. The De Largesses had also held high offices; had been famous soldiers, prelates, judges, and the like honourable persons, and had ever been known for a fair name and an open hand. The present possessor appeared to have inherited all the good qualities of his ancestors; and though he was called by no higher name than good Sir Marmaduke, I doubt hugely any prouder title could have become him better. He had never been known to be in a passion; and though ever inclined for a jest, his mirth had no offence in it at any time. There sat he as stout of limb as of heart, on a noble grey horse, sleek coated and well limbed, ever and anon patting his graceful neck with some commendable speech, which the poor brute beast took as proudly as though he knew the value of such behaviour from so respected a quarter.

On each side of him rode his kinsmen in all the bravery of the times. They had gone to the wars in their youth, and though still scarce upon manhood, Sir Valentine being but twenty, and his cousin Sir Reginald five years his senior, had shown such valour against the enemy that they had received knighthood. The first was full of fine chivalrous notions, as became his soldiership; and would have dared all manner of great dangers to have gained the kind opinions of fair ladies, as became his manhood. Of the inestimable sweet pleasures of love could he think by the hour together; and when he took to his gittern, doubtless it was to breathe forth some soft lay learned of him in France of the gallants there. Yet of a most honourable heart was he, as became a true lover; and his rapier was ready to leap out of its scabbard at the bruit of wrong done to any woman. He was of a clear transparent skin, whereon the delicate moustache had already come to some conspicuousness, and the sharp outline of each fair feature had such fineness as was exquisite to behold. Eyes had he in colour like unto a bright sky in harvest time, and his hair was of a soft rich brown, that grew in waving folds over all his head and neck.

Sir Reginald was more manly-looking; darker in complexion, hair, and beard; less delicate in his notions; more free in his speech; and was as ready for loving any pretty woman, yet did so with an indiscriminateness which the other never affected. Both were strict friends, as they had proved in many a time of need in the hour of battle, and both were alike honourably disposed, and of unblemished reputations. These two young gentlemen rode their palfreys like gallants, putting them to their prettiest paces one against the other, and ever and anon turning round their handsome cheerful faces, with one hand holding the back of the saddle, and the other reining up their gamesome steeds to see how their sport was relished by their kinsman, who it may well be believed took it very pleasantly, for he was ever an encourager of any innocent pastime that served to make happy the passing hour.

Behind them, a little way, rode Sir Johan, the chaplain, who would sometimes jog on alongside of his good patron, discoursing very soberly concerning how bountiful Providence had been to the surrounding country, seasoning his speech with such learning as did not savour of pedantry. For all this he was not indifferent to a jest on any proper occasion. Right well could he laugh at one himself, and with as much aptness furnish one for his company. Indeed, he was one of those rare divines who take upon them to think that whatsoever good thing may be met with, is provided for our especial enjoyment, and that to mislike them argueth utter ignorance, a wonderful lack of discretion, and a most unwarrantable and absolute ingratitude. Therefore Sir Johan was never seen with a long face and a miserable preaching. His orthodoxy was evidently of a most comfortable sort. It agreed with him exceedingly, and sat on his round cheeks after a fashion that must have been wonderfully enticing to all wretched fosterers of schisms and heresy. Yet was he no Sir Nathaniel, but his very opposite. It is true he would eat and drink heartily at all reasonable hours; but then he never forgot to give as hearty thanks, and always conducted himself on such occasions with a creditable decency the other was far from shewing. Nothing was like the vigour of his piety after he had enjoyed himself to his heart's content; and the eloquence, the learning, and the zealousness with which he would then dilate upon the marvellous goodness of Providence, carried conviction to all hearers. His scholarship would have become a bishop, though he was nothing but a poor master of arts; nevertheless, he was content with his station, and like a wise man enjoyed to the full whatever honest pleasures it brough within his reach.

By his side usually rode Master Peregrine, in an antique suit that might have belonged to his grandfather: in his figure an admirable contrast to the full proportions of the worthy chaplain; and he talked to the latter, or to the boy riding between them, when he could not get the other as a listener, as if he could never tire at it, of old books and ballads, their histories, contents, character, form and complexion. Indeed, he seemed familiar with every thing that had been printed since the invention of the art. The very talk of a rare book would put him into a rapture, and a ballad that was not to be met with he would think more precious than gold. Then he would speak in such choice terms of Chaucer, and Gower, and Wyatt, and Surrey, and a many others, as though none could be of so great account; but when he got to the speaking of ballads, nought could exceed the delectable manner in which he dilated upon them, in especial of such as were of a by-gone age.

William Shakspeare, as he rode between these two last, learned more of books than he had known all his days before. Nothing could be so pleasant to him as such discourse. He listened with such earnestness as was the admiration of his companions, and asked questions to the purpose, that they were never indisposed to answer him. More and more delighted was he to hear such famous books might be met with as those notable classic authors, both Greeks and Latins, Sir Johan spoke so learnedly on, and those exquisite sweet poets and romancers Master Peregrine mentioned so lovingly; and he was quite in an ecstacy when they promised to make him better acquainted with their worth at such times as he chose to visit them at Sir Marmaduke's mansion. So rode he along in his neat suit of frolic green, as much at his ease as any of the company, till he was called upon to furnish their entertainment, as had been designed; and then he unfolded his store of ballads, and Master Peregrine assisted him with such particulars of their history as had come to his knowledge, that all allowed so proper a companion for a journey they could never have met with.

On they proceeded in this orderly manner till they came to the town of Long Ichington, some seven miles distant, where my Lord of Leicester had erected a tent of such capaciousness and grandeur, never was seen the like; and here it was intended to give her Majesty a truly magnificent banquet, previous to her departure to his Lordship's famous Castle of Kenilworth she was coming to honour with a visit. Now it should be known to all, the Earl of Leicester was in especial favour of the Queen, his mistress. No man more so, and as her Majesty, in one of her progresses at that time, had given him assurance she would do him such honour as to make his castle her residence for some little while, he had busied himself with prodigious expenses to make becoming preparations. This visit of the queen engrossed the public talk, and as a knowledge of the splendour of its accompaniments got abroad, the inhabitants of the adjacent neighbourhood became the more impatient to behold them. As for my Lord of Leicester, he was diversely reported; some asserting there was not his like for a prodigal disposition; and others, though they cautiously mentioned the matter, spoke of him as one who held no discipline over his passions, save before those who could punish him for his misdoings; and that he scrupled not to use his great power to the furthering of any great wickedness he had a mind to.

Be this as it may, our young traveller and his worshipful company, after seeing all at this town they could get a sight of, departed towards the evening, with her Majesty and an immense concourse of her loyal subjects, to the Castle of Kenilworth. There, at her first entrance, was beheld a floating island on a pool, made bright with a many torches, whereon sat the lady of the lake with two nymphs, who, in very choice verse, gave her Highness a famous account of the history of that building, and its owners. Close by was a Triton riding on a mermaid, at least some eighteen feet in length, and also Arion on a dolphin. The queen passed over a stately bridge, in the base court, on each side of which, upon tall columns, were placed a store of all manner of delectable gifts, supposed to come from the Gods, such as a cage of wild-fowl from Sylvanus, sundry sorts of fruits from Pomona, great heaps of corn from Ceres, vessels of choice wine from Bacchus, divers kinds of sea-fish from Neptune, warlike appointments from Mars, and instruments of music from Phœbus: which rare conceit was much relished of all, and shouts rent the air as her Highness took note of them.

All this afforded wonderful entertainment to William Shakspeare; but his marvel became the greater, when he beheld the infinite variety of such things which met him at every turn. He could never tire of admiring the rare beauty of that stately castle carved out of the hard quarry, the magnificence of such of the chambers as his companions got him access to; and the ravishing beauty of the garden, with its bowers, alleys, obelisks, spheres, white bears, with the ragged staff, the armorial bearings of the lordly owner, exquisite flowers and delicious fruits, that met him go which way he would. Again was he in a great pleasure at sight of a cage of some twenty feet, the outside garnished with all manner of shining stones, the inside decked with fresh holly trees, and furnished with cavernous places, where a multitudinous collection of foreign birds of all parts had been collected; and also, at beholding the grand fountain in fashion of a column made of two athletes, back to back, supporting a huge bowl, which, by means of certain pipes, did distil continual streams of water running, where a plenty of lively fishes were disporting of themselves, along side of which were Neptune, with his trident and sea-horses; Thetis, in her chariot and dolphins; Triton, in company with his fishes; Proteus herding of his sea bulls; and other of the like famous emblems, set in eight different compartments, with admirable sculpture of waves, shells, and huge monsters of the deep, with the ragged staff in fair white marble at top, and gates of massy silver for entrance.

But the sports that were then and there enacted for the Queen's pastime, none could have so relished as did he, especially the chace with the savage man, clad in ivy, and his company of satyrs; the bear-baitings and the fire-works, the Italian tumblers, the festival of the brideale, and the games of running at the quintain and morrice dancing. Beside which, to his great diversion, he witnessed the Coventry men playing the old play of Hock Tuesday, representing in a sort of tilting match, and in dumb shew, the defeat of the Danes by the English, in the time of King Ethelred, the which so pleased her Majesty, that she bestowed on the players two bucks, to make good cheer with, and five marks in money, to garnish the feast; and after supper, the same evening, he was taken into the castle, to see a play of a higher sort played by men better approved in their art, that was then writ, and played for her Majesty's particular delectation; and though it lasted two long hours, he was so enamoured of the manner in which it was set forth, he would have been glad enough to have stayed all night, had they not come to an ending.

All this, and a wonderful deal more of splendour, pageantry, and pastime, was continued in infinite variety for nineteen days, with such prodigal feasting and rejoicing as none had previously been acquainted with; and the entire of it good Sir Marmaduke took care his young companion should see, during which he had him as well lodged, and as carefully provided, as if he had been his own son, he was so pleased with him; and either he, Master Peregrine or Sir Johan, explained the character and purport of such things as he knew not of, so that he reaped both pleasure and profit wherever he went. Every thing was to him so new and strange, that he was kept in a continual state of pleasurable excitement he had never known all his life before—even the choice excellence of Gammer Gurton's needle was eclipsed by the singular fine recreation he was then enjoying.

It did sometimes happen that although he strove all he could to keep with his company, they would get separated in the throng, and then he would have a great to do to find them again; and once, after the old knight had promised he would take him to see her majesty, of whom he had not as yet got a sight, because of the crowd of nobles that were ever around her, a sudden press of persons going in a contrary direction set them so far asunder, that in a few minutes the boy found himself in a place where there were many turnings, of which it was impossible to say which might be the one his friends had taken. Believing he was not like to gain the required knowledge by asking, where such a multitude of strange persons were assembled, he chose a path with the determination of seeking all ways till he found the right one. He wandered up and down the green allies, greatly admiring the deliciously various trees, bedecked with apples, pears, and ripe cherries, the beds of blushing strawberries, and the plots of fragrant herbs and flowers, which cast beauty and sweetness wherever he walked, yet of his friends saw he not the slightest sign; indeed, he had gone so far he at last met with no person of any kind. Getting to be somewhat bewildered at searching so long with such small profit, upon turning round a corner he came suddenly upon a lady and gentleman, with a grand company at some distance behind. The gentleman was most gorgeously apparelled. Nothing could be so costly as the rich satin embroidered with gold and jewels that formed his cloak, save the delicate fabric of his doublet, wherein the same glorious magnificence was apparent. A massy gold chain of a curious fashion, hung over his breast—gems of price glittered on the handle of his dagger—his sword seemed wrought with the like preciousness—his hose were of the delicatest pink silk, woven with silver threads all over the upper part of the leg where they joined the trunks, which were of crimson and orange colour prettily slashed and richly embroidered like the sleeves of the doublet. The rest of his appointments corresponded with what hath been already described, and being of a fine make and somewhat handsome countenance, they became him infinitely. He appeared to be playing the gallant to his fair companion, for there was an air of exceeding deep homage and admiration in the looks with which he regarded her.

The lady was attired in a full robe of white satin, ornamented with rosettes in great number,—in the midst of which was a pearl in every one,—trimmed with the richest lace. A ruff of lace still more costly lay in folds upon her neck, surmounted by wings of stiffened lawn, set all round with pearls. Her hair was combed from the forehead, and pearls of a very large size set in it, with a great shew of other jewels equally precious; but pearls appeared to be a favourite ornament, for besides what have been mentioned, they were in her ears,—they were round her neck, and upon her bosom,—a long string of them hung down to her stomacher,—and they were worked into the material of her dress wherever there was place for them. She was of a fair complexion, well featured, though she could not be called in her youth, of an agreeable aspect, and of an excellent stately deportment, and appeared to be listening with singular satisfaction to what fell from the gallant at her side.

"What ho, my young master, what seekest thou?" exclaimed she, upon noticing of William Shakspeare standing looking at the two, as if so dazzled with the brave shew they made, he knew not at first whether to turn back or go on; but believing them to be persons of worship, had taken off his hat, and stood respectfully to let them pass.

"An' it please you, I have lost my way," cried he. "I have been forced to part from my friends, by reason of the great crowd, and should I not overtake them soon, perchance I may miss seeing the Queen, the which famous sight they were proceeding to when I was forced away from them."

"Hast never seen the Queen?" enquired the lady, seemingly charmed with the ingenuousness of the boy's manner.

"No, indeed, I have not, by reason of the throng about her," answered he. "But I should be right glad to see her, for never yet have I seen a queen of any kind, and I have heard say our Queen Elizabeth is a most gracious lady." At hearing this the lady looked at her companion, and he at her, with a peculiar smile, doubtless of some pleasant manner.

"And suppose I shew thee Queen Elizabeth, my little master, what wouldst say to her?" asked she.

"Nay, I would say nought of mine own accord," said the other, "as methinks it might savour of a too great boldness in me; but asked she of me any question, I would with all proper courtesy answer as I best could,—and doubt not I would thank you heartily for affording me so brave a sight."

"By my troth, well said!" exclaimed the lady, as if in an excellent satisfaction. "What say you, my Lord of Leicester, shall we shew this youngster, that speaks so prettily, what he has such huge desire to see?" added she, turning with an arch look to her gallant.

"O' my life, to my thinking, he deserveth no less," replied the nobleman.

"An' it please you," said William Shakspeare respectfully, "it seemeth to me you must needs be the Queen yourself."

"Ha, young sir! and why dost fancy that?" exclaimed Queen Elizabeth, for, as the reader may readily believe, it was no other.

"Because you have so brave an appearance with you," answered he, "and look so gracious withal. Indeed, an' you are not her in truth, I should be well pleased an' you were, for never saw I so excellent sweet a lady."

"Indeed! But thou playest the courtier betimes, my pretty master!" cried her majesty in an admirable good humour.

"And the varlet doth it so gracefully!" added my Lord of Leicester, who seemed to be as much taken with him as was his royal mistress.

"Here is a remembrance for thee," said the Queen, giving him a gold piece out of her purse; "I do applaud thy wit in having made so notable a discovery; and doubt not, if thou goest on as well as thou commenced, thou and Fortune will shake hands anon!"

Then calling to some of those of her officers who were behind her, her majesty gave the boy to them with strict charge to seek out his friends, and deliver him to them safely; but it so happened he had not proceeded far in such custody, when he met them; and all were in some marvel to hear what strange adventure he had fallen into.

It was getting towards eve of the same day, when two persons stood close under the terrace that lay along the castle. One was closely muffled up, and endeavouring all he could to hide his face and person from observation, and he kept continually turning of his eyes in every direction to note if any were watching, whilst he spoke in a low voice to his companion. The other was also cloaked, but seemed more intent upon hearkening to the discourse of his associate than to any other matter.

"Art sure of her person?" asked the first in a low whisper.

"I marked her well, my lord," answered the other in the same subdued voice; "O' my life, never saw I so exquisite fair a creature!"

"Indeed she is of ravishing perfections—a very angel in the bud!" exclaimed his companion in a fervent ecstacy. "Fresh in youth and perfect in beauty! in brief, I have never seen her peer in all my experience. Do as I would have thee, thy fortune's made."

"Count upon her as your own, my good lord."

"But be cautious, on your life."

"Be assured, in subtlety I will beat the cunningest fox that ever robbed hen-roost."

"Away! I cannot stay another minute, or my absence will be marked." Whereupon both glided different ways in the shadow, and were no more visible.

Among the company the fame of these princely pleasures had attracted to Kenilworth, were Sir Thomas Lucy and his good dame, who had brought with them, as an attendant to the latter, no other than their pretty foundling, the gentle Mabel, now grown to be that indefinable delicate example of feminine graces that lieth betwixt girlhood and womanhood. Under the careful instruction of her patroness, she had been well schooled in all such learning as was proper for a young person of such humble fortunes: but of her own natural well-disposedness she acquired such wisdom as would have fitted her had she come of the noblest families. Of her parents none knew a syllable; and Dame Lucy fancying none but mean persons could behave so meanly as to desert their child, had brought her up in such fashion as she considered her origin to be of the humblest, intending her for a servant, and ever attempting to impress on her mind a humility corresponding with one meant for so pitiful a condition. However, having resolved she should to Kenilworth in their company, the good Dame had taken care her attire should be of a better sort than what she usually wore, never failing the whilst she gave them for her wearing, to accompany them with a notable fine homily upon the wickedness of poor girls seeking to put on them such apparelling as was above their station.

Mabel was that evening standing between her elderly companions beholding the fire-works. There was a huge crowd a little way before her. A strange gallant very courteously directed the attention of the knight and his lady to what was worthiest of notice, and in a very friendly manner gave them intelligence of what was going to be done, at what cost it had been made, and by whose skilfulness it was constructed; to the which, Sir Thomas Lucy in especial, gave famous attention, entering cheerfully into the discourse, and striving to appear as familiar with the matter as his instructor.

"I warrant you!" exclaimed he; "methinks I ought to know something of such things. Ay, marry, I have been as familiar with them as am I with my hand."

"As I live, I took you to be some learned gentleman when I had first sight of you," cried the stranger, with an appearance of monstrous respect; "you have it in your face, sir; indeed your look savoureth so much of sagacity that none can mistake it. Doubtless you are some great Doctor?"

"O' my word, but a simple knight o' the shire, good sir," replied the other in a famous satisfaction.

"And a justice of peace, Sir Thomas," added Dame Lucy, anxious her husband's greatness should not be imperfectly known.

"I would have sworn it!" exclaimed their companion.

"By'r Lady now, is it so visible?" cried the other, as much astonished as gratified. "But, as I was about saying, when I was at college I was wonderfully given to the study of chemicals and alchemy; ay, to such extreme that I make no manner of doubt I should have got at the philosopher's stone had I kept at my experiments long enough."

"Of that I am assured," observed the stranger.

"But my chief pleasure was in the making of strange fires that would burn of all colours," continued the knight. "These I learned of a famous clerk, who was studying chemicals, and was considered more apt at it than any of his time."

"A very Friar Bacon, doubtless, Sir Thomas," said his companion.

"Marry, yes, that was he," replied the justice. "Now, I was ever a letting off my fires, to the terror of all simple people, who could not fancy they were of this world, and marvellous proper sport had I on such occasions; for, as I live, I was such a fellow at tricks I had not my match, go where I would."

"I would I had known you then; I was just such another," exclaimed the stranger, very merrily.

"Ay, it would have done your heart good to have seen the tricks I have played," continued Sir Thomas, laughing with exceeding heartiness. "I have been as wild a colt as ever broke his tether, I promise you."

"No, indeed, have you?" cried the other, joining in his companion's mirth to some excess.

"By cock and pye, yes; and among the bona robas too," added he, in a voice and manner meant to be still more facetious, as he gave his companion a sly nudge at his elbow.

"Odds my life, Sir Thomas!" exclaimed the stranger, apparently increasing the greatness of his humour, "you were a fit companion for the Sophy."

"I was as familiar with them all as though we had been cousins," added the knight, after the same fashion. "Indeed, I was so partial to these pretty ones, that if any of my fellows said, 'Yonder is a kirtle,' off would I start on the instant, though I had a mile to run."

"Fie, fie, Sir Thomas!" exclaimed Dame Lucy, good humouredly; then turning to the stranger with a monstrous innocent sort of countenance, added, "Think not so ill of him, good sir, I pray you, for I have known him this thirty year and more, and he hath never done ought of the kind, I'll warrant."

"I doubt it not, believe me," replied the other, with more sincerity than he chose should be known. "But if it please you to come a little more to this side," said he, with exceeding courteousness, "you shall behold what is far beyond what you have already seen."

"We will, and thank you," answered Sir Thomas, eagerly, and he with Dame Lucy, presently moved in that direction.

In the mean while, another courteous gentleman was paying similar attentions to the fair Mabel, who received them in a thankful spirit, as she ever did any appearance of kindness from another. He told her the wonders of the castle—the great power and princely magnificence of the possessor—what famous noble lords and fair ladies were of the company, and the unparalleled preciousness of the jewelled silks and velvets that were of their wearing; and he took care to season all with some delicate flattery or another, well suited to win the ear of one of her youth and inexperience.

"Indeed these nobles have a fine time of it, methinks," said her companion. "They have every thing that heart can wish for, at their command; and any fair creature who is so fortunate as to win the love of such, cannot help knowing that extreme happiness few have any notion of. Dost not think women so fortunate are greatly to be envied, sweetest?"

"Doubtless, honourable sir, if they be worthy," replied Mabel.

"Crowds of servants come at their command," continued the stranger, more earnestly. "Whatever they can fancy, let it be of ever such cost, is brought to them ere they can well say they want it—the exquisitest sweet music fills the air around them day and night—all manner of ravishing perfumes of flowers and herbs and odoriferous gums, enrich the atmosphere they breathe; and he whose princely nature they have so bound in their chains as to hold him prisoner to their admirable lustrous eyes, is ever at their will, glorifying them with his praise, deifying them with his devotion, and making every hour of their lives redolent with the unutterable ecstacies of his sovereign and most absolute affections. Dost not think such women infinitely fortunate?"

"I know not how they could help being so, were they well disposed," answered the foundling.

"Just so, sweetest one," observed the gallant. "Now, supposing such thing as this should happen:—some such noble person as I have described—the equal of the proudest—the master of the wealthiest, getting sight of your own most absolute grace——"

"What, I?" exclaimed Mabel, in a famous astonishment.

"And straightway falling enamoured of the bright perfections of your spotless nature," continued he; "his princely heart thrilling with the divinest sensations, should be in a feverish impatience to cast his greatness at your feet, and all out of love for such inestimable choice beauty of mind and feature, should be ready to fall out with life, if by chance you deny him the happiness he would find in your inestimable company."

"Surely you are jesting, good sir," observed his fair companion. "I know not of such things as you speak of. Indeed, I am so humble a person, none, such as you have said, would ever trouble themselves about me for a single moment: nevertheless I thank you kindly for your good opinion of me, and should be right glad to possess any merit that would make me deserve it better than I do."

"That cannot be, o' my life, excellent creature!" replied the gallant, with a seeming fervour. "'Tis your too great modesty that preventeth you from seeing your own notable divine excellences."

"Indeed you think too well of me—I have no sign of any such thing," said Mabel; her truly unassuming nature shrinking from the flattery; then looking round, for the first time observed that Sir Thomas and Dame Lucy were no where near her. "Alack! where can they have gone!" exclaimed she, in some to do. "They will be exceeding angry I took no better heed to keep close to them wherever they went, as they told me."

"Speak you of your friends, sweetest?" enquired the other, in an indifferent manner. "I saw them myself not a moment since, moving round this way. If you will allow of my protection, I will take care you join them so soon you shall not be missed at all."

"I should be loath to put you to such trouble on my account, I thank you heartily," answered his fair companion, "I will seek them myself, the way you have kindly told me." Thereupon she moved in that direction, the gallant keeping at her side, but not a sign of the knight or his good dame could they see.

"Woe is me, I have lost all sight of them!" cried Mabel, now in no little trouble of mind. "How heedless I must have been to have let them go away without my knowing it."

"Surely there they are, yonder!" exclaimed the stranger, pointing to two figures dimly discerned at the top of one of the green alleys, walking slowly away.

"Indeed they have some likeness to them," she replied, yet seeming to hesitate about their identity.

"They cannot be any other, I would swear it," said the gallant, with monstrous earnestness; "see you not the knight's very doublet? nay, an' you do not make some speed, they will turn the corner, and mayhap you may lose sight of them altogether." Thereupon Mabel, without another word, tripped lightly along the path—her companion still keeping close to her side—and when they got to the top they beheld the two persons they had seen turning round a corner into an alley beyond; at the sight of which the poor foundling started off again, in great anxiety to overtake them, but with no better success; for, however fast she ran, as she got to the end of one path, the figures were seen turning round at the end of another, and so it continued for such a time she would have given up the pursuit in despair, had not the gallant kept encouraging her to proceed. At last, when she was nigh exhausted with her exertions, and in extreme discomfort, because now she saw no appearance whatever of those she took to be the knight and his lady, on a sudden she heard a loud whistle behind her, that appeared to come from her companion,—the which it did beyond all contradiction, for he had that moment put a whistle to his mouth,—and ere she could think what was the meaning of such strange behaviour, two or three stout fellows rushed from a grove of trees close at hand, and, despite of a sharp scream she gave, threw a large cloak over her, in the which she was muffled up in a minute, and borne helplessly along.

"Never was hawk lured so cleverly," said the gallant, in evident gratification at the complete success of his villanous scheme.

"She is now hooded, and must to her mews with what speed we can. Slight!" here sharply exclaimed he, seemingly in a very absolute vexation; "what pestilent interruption is this?—But they are but two, so haste, for your lives, we can give them work enough, prove they for meddling."

It so happened that Sir Valentine and his friend were together in an adjoining walk, when they heard the whistle, and the scream following close upon it; their rapiers were out in an instant, and they were just in time to see a female muffled up and borne away. This brought them to the spot presently. Two of the villains carried Mabel, and were making off, whilst their companions were engaged with the young knights, who were using their weapons briskly with each an opponent; but coming suddenly to the rest of Sir Valentine's party, led by Sir Marmaduke, who had plucked out his trusty rapier, the moment he heard the clashing of blades, his imposing appearance struck a panic amongst them. The two fellows dropped their burthen without caring to make his acquaintance, and, with the rest, made off in different directions.

It was difficult to say which was most affected with the unusual loveliness of the gentle Mabel, Sir Valentine or Sir Reginald, as they disengaged her from her unwelcome covering, whilst the others assured her of her perfect safety. They were dumb with excess of admiration. Nothing they had seen or imagined came in any way like the exquisite innocency and faultless loveliness of her features. She seemed to them to be some fair spirit of a better world—such as ancient poets have described haunting clear streams and mossy caves, and the deep hollows of the emerald woods, by such names as sylphs, dryades, and the like. Woman she could scarce be styled, she looked so young, and yet each was loath she should be called any other name, believing nothing was so worthy of love and reverence. As for the poor foundling, she was in some confusion to be so gazed upon by strangers; she had not yet recovered from the surprise and fear she had been put to by the treachery of her late companion, and gazed about her, the prettiest picture of amazement that had ever been witnessed. Even the antiquarian stared through his spectacles at her as earnestly as he had at the ancientest ballad that had fallen into his hands; and William Shakspeare, boy as he was, appeared as though there was a power in her admirable beauty he felt all through his nature, yet with a confused sense of its particular meaning, that would take no definite interpretation. It is here only necessary to add, that the young and graceful creature found every possible attention and respect from those in whose company she had so fortunately fallen. A search was quickly commenced for the knight and his lady, and after some trouble, taken of the young knights as the sweetest pleasure they had ever enjoyed, she was restored to them, but not without such thanks from her, as, for the gentle sweet graciousness with which they were accompanied, never left their memories from that time forward. As for William Shakspeare, he returned to his loving parents, surprising them greatly with the goodly store of gifts, he would needs pour into his mother's lap, which had been bestowed on him by his friends; but putting them in a still greater wonder at his marvellous relations of what strange adventures he had had, and famous sights he had beheld, since he had been away.

CHAPTER XI.

His browny locks did hang in crooked curls,
And every light occasion of the wind
Upon his lips their silken parcels hurls.
His qualities were beauteous as his form,
For maiden-tongued he was and therefore free.

SHAKSPEARE.

For him was lever han at his beddes hed
A twenty bokes, clothed in black or red,
Of Aristotle, and his philosophie,
Than robes riche, or fidel, or sautrie.

CHAUCER.

Oh, ye gods,
Give me a worthy patience! Have I stood
Naked, alone, the shock of many fortunes!
Have I seen mischiefs numberless and mighty
Grow like a sea upon me? Have I taken
Danger as stern as death into my bosom,
And laughed upon it, made it but a mirth,
And flung it by. * * * Do I
Bear all this bravely, and must sink at last
Under a woman's falsehood!

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

"NAY, I cannot abide these new-fangled novelties," observed Master Peregrine, who with the others of the squire's company, with William Shakspeare in the midst, appeared to be examining of certain shelves of books that were in an antique oak chamber in Sir Marmaduke's mansion. "They be but for the delighting of dainty ears, and such whose fantasies are only to be tickled with fine filed phrases. I like not the boy should have such poor reading."

"I assure you the Mirrour for Magistrates is in excellent repute of all men," said Sir Reginald. "It is a very admirable fine poem, or series of legends, relating the falls of the unfortunate princes of this land, first originating with my Lord Sackville, and now carried on by divers authors of reputation."

"Nay, I have here one that he will more approve of," cried Sir Valentine, as he held a volume in his hand that looked quite new. "It is called the Paradyse of Daynty Devises, aptly furnished with sundry pithie and learned inventions, devised and written for the most part by Master Edwards, sometime of her majesties chappel; the rest by sundry learned gentlemen both of honour and worshippe. It is full of delectable poems, I promise you, that are read and hugely admired by all persons of quality."

"I doubt not," said the chaplain, who had also a book in his hand. "But methinks I have something here far more fitting, of the ingenious Master Tuberville, being no other than The heroicall Epistles of the learned poet Publius Ovidius Naso, with Aulus Sabinus' answers to certaine of the same—a very famous and proper classic."

"What have we here?" cried the old knight, examining a volume he had just taken off the shelf. "A hundreth Good Pointes of Husbandrie, as I live, and very profitable reading doubtless."

"Pish, what wants he with books of such a sort?" enquired Master Peregrine impatiently, as he regarded with particular satisfaction a huge folio from the same place. "This is such as he will like most. O' my word, it is a treasure beyond all price. This great rarity is entituled, A book of the noble Hystoryes of Kynge Arthur, and of certeyn of his Knyghtes, and is from Caxton's own press, and bears the date anno 1485. O what a jewel!—O what a pearl of price! In good fay, I can scarce take my eyes off such an inestimable rare volume."

William Shakspeare turned his intelligent eyes from one to another, as each recommended his particular book, almost puzzled which of these goodly volumes he should choose first, but in a wonderful impatience to be at one of them.

"Methinks, after all, 'twill be best to let him make his own choice," observed Sir Marmaduke. "What say you, young sir," said he to him. "Which of all these books think you the properest for your reading?"

"An' it please your worship," replied William, with much simplicity, "I must needs read them all before I can say which is best, with any justice."

"E'en do so then, if it likes you," exclaimed the old knight, laughing heartily with the rest. "There are they—you are welcome to their perusal, come when you will. But there is one volume I would have you take great note of, and that is called The Gentleman's Academie, or the Booke of St. Albans, writ by one Juliana Barnes, containing the choicest accounts of hawking, hunting, and armorie, I have met with any where."

"Truly, 'tis a most ravishing work!" said Master Peregrine. "A notable rare specimen of the types of Wynkyn de Worde. But if you be for grave reading, choose you The Seven Wise Masters. If you are for mirth, pitch upon The Hundred Merry Tales—if for the reading of other light tales, nought will so well serve your turn as The Palace of Pleasure. Take you to romances, you may find exquisite diversion in Amadis of Gaul, Palmerin of England, Huon of Bordeaux, Sir Bevis of Southampton, Sir Guy of Warwick, The Seven Champions, Valentyne and Orson, The Squire of Low Degree, The Knight of Courtesie, and the Lady Faguel, The Castle of Ladies, and a hundred others of equal great merit;—but if you are for ballads, my young master, exquisite choice ballads and songs of old time, look you out for the Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green, Queen Dido, Fortune my Foe, Pepper is Black, Adam Bell, Clym of the Clough, and William of Cloudesly, Robin Hood and the Pindar of Wakefield, and others out of all number of every kind, subject, and quality, which are here ready for your reading."

"All such are well enough in their way," observed Sir Johan. "But if he take not to reading of the classics, all other reading whatsoever advanceth him not a whit in his education. What can be learn of ancient history, save out of Herodotus, Thucydes, Xenophon, Titus Livius, Tacitus, and Cæsar; where in philosophy can he have such guides as Aristotle, Socrates, Epicurus, Euclid, that famous master of figures; Pliny, that curious observer of nature, and Celsus, that profound expounder of surgicals? In poetry what is like unto the works of Homer, Pindar, Anacreon, Virgil, Horace, or Ovid? And in eloquence what can come in any way near unto Demosthenes, or Cicero? Truly then the classics should be before all other books, for the study of any young person, and so it will be found in all colleges and schools throughout Christendom."

These advocates for modern and ancient learning might have waxed warm in their dispute, had they been allowed, and the two young knights also took part in it in praise of chivalrous tales, Italian sonnets, and French lays and romances; but Sir Marmaduke good humouredly put an end to the argument, by telling them the dinner bell was a ringing, which caused them to forget their books awhile, and look to their appetites.

Thus it will be seen that William Shakspeare was bountifully provided for in all manner of learning, and it may well be believed he was not long in availing himself of the treasures so liberally placed at his disposal. All spare time he could get was passed in the old knight's library, where he kept, like a bird in a granary, feeding on the plenteous store in a most grateful spirit, and with no desire to move from such excellent neighbourhood. But he was rarely left alone for any great period, for Sir Marmaduke and his friends were too well pleased with his quickness of apprehension and untiring industry, not to do all in their power to assist the studies of so promising a scholar: therefore he was sure to have with him either the old knight himself, who would readily go over with him any creditable book of legends, or ancient customs and sports; or his chaplain, who took huge pains he should not be indifferent to the treasures of classic lore, never forgetting, by the by, to put in on an occasion, some most moving discourse on the goodness of Providence, and explain the chief points of all moral doctrine. Then came Master Peregrine ready to cuddle him with delight, should he find him intent upon some worm-eaten black letter folio, or a bundle of old ballads, and he would not rest till he had made his pupil familiar with whatsoever concerning of them he thought worthy of knowing—and at another time he would be visited by the two young knights, with whom he was in particular esteem, and they were ever striving to possess him with the notion that the gallantest accomplishments were the most worthy of study, especially of the Italian tongue, and that nought was like unto the sweetness of Petrarch, the pleasantry of Boccaccio, or the grandeur of Dante, Tasso, and Ariosto.

From this it is evident that none could have a fairer schooling than our young scholar. Indeed, he now gained more knowledge in a day than he could have had of that pedantic, poor ignoramus, his schoolmaster, all his life; and it was the marvel of all to notice how famously he got on in his learning. There appeared to be nothing he could not give a reason for, or description of, for he took infinite trouble by asking questions of all sorts of people, as well as conning of every book in Sir Marmaduke's library, to remain ignorant of as little as possible. Hour after hour hath he passed at a time over some pithy book, till his head would ache with the intentness with which he would give his mind to the matter of it—then away went he like a wild buck of the forest, broke loose from confinement, over the green fields and through the nutty woods, hither and thither everywhere, drinking within his nostrils, choked with the closeness of musty volumes, the sweet pure air freshened with the cool breeze—and at his aching eyes, tired of the sameness of so much paper and print, taking in with as greedy a draught the pleasant greenness of the teeming soil, and the delicate soft blue of the expanding heavens.

Some how or another it happened, that he often found himself thinking of the beautiful fair creature he had seen rescued by his friends from the hands of villains, when he was enjoying the princely pleasures of Kenilworth. In his solitary musings, whereof after any deep study, he had of late taken to, her radiant features would suddenly glide into his youthful mind, like as a sudden burst of sunshine pierceth the leafy branches of a young tree; and all his thoughts took a character of such brightness on the instant, as shewed there was some power of brilliancy in her image that made resplendent its whole neighbourhood. This to him was both new and strange. The forms of beauty of which he had had experience, and they were by no means few, had given delight—most exquisite delight—but here was something presented to him of a totally different character—of a most singular admirable loveliness; and the pleasure he derived from its observation he felt to be of a far more exquisite sort than he had known heretofore. The varied dies of the delicatest flowers peeping from their vernal coverts—the tall monarchs of the forests, bending their haughty heads to the rude wind—the soft mingling of field and wood, hill, stream, and valley, bathed in their mellow tints, that made up the ravishing fair landscape—the glorious shew of unsurpassed magnificence, visible at the sun's rising and going down, which clothed the skies, like an oriental conqueror, in a garment of purple and gold, and the more graceful splendour of the quiet night, when earth's unrivalled roof seems as though carved all about with the likeness of a goodly almond tree, as 'tis seen at eve, with his verdure deepening into a dark blue, spread over in every part with myriads of sylvery blossoms—he could enjoy with such huge zest as hearts attuned to sympathy with the beautiful can alone have knowledge of; but in the outward lineaments of this novel sign of the presence of nature's unrivalled handiwork, there appeared such moving graces, that plainly shewed the masterpiece confessed; and he had some glimpses, in the delicious raptures which an increasing familiarity with his mental perception of the beautiful promised him, of that marvellous deep meaning which lieth most manifestly in the choicest and perfectest shape in which our bountiful mother hath given it a dwelling.

Let none feel incredulous of what is here put down. Though still in years apparent, but of an unripe boyhood, the child had in him the greatness of the man in embryo. Take you the bud, examine it narrowly, you shall find in it a miniature-tree, perfect in all its parts; or the bean—as its sides have opened to shew some promise of what it will be—and behold all the characters of the plant minutely visible to your close inspection! Nature never varieth from her first original type. In all things that promise a profitable increase, the power is folded up in the germ, where, despite of disadvantages, it will gradually unfold itself, till the character she hath put upon it is perfectly developed to all men's eyes. Could we look into the immaturity of any of those great ones, whose mental fruit have been the nourishing diet of every age that hath passed since they flourished, be sure that we should find at such early period, the very appearances and manifestations of their after perfection, as are here imperfectly described concerning of William Shakspeare. As for beauty, it is the very sunshine of the soul, without which shall the seed of greatness lie dormant as in a perpetual frost; but directly it beginneth to make itself felt, out come stem, root, and leaflet, with such goodly vigour, that in a presently the brave plant putteth out its branches so lovingly, nought can resist its progress; and lo! in a little while, what numberless rare blossoms appear, manifesting in themselves the quality by which they were created.

But our young scholar was not the only one on whom the attractions of the gentle Mabel had made a powerful impression. Sir Valentine, and his friend, oft spoke of her to each other with exceeding admiration, to which, if in his company, the boy would listen with a flushed cheek and a throbbing heart, seeming to be poring over his book,—but this he had as clean lost sight of for the nonce as if it and he were a hundred miles apart.

"She is, indeed, a delectable creature!" exclaimed Sir Valentine, as they three were together in the library. "She seemed a being just stepped out of some French romance, one of the virtues perchance, or better, some incomparable damsel, possessed of them all in her own fair person, who was about falling into the hands of a powerful ogre, or other monstrous villain that is a foe to chastity, when we two knights going about to redress wrong and defend oppressed innocence, each for the honour of chivalry and his liege lady, stepped up to her rescue, and, by the help of our valour, quickly delivered her from her enemies."

"A most moving picture," cried Sir Reginald laughingly; "I would give something to see it done in tapestry."

"O' my word, 'twould be a fine subject," said his friend, with some earnestness; "I doubt not, too, of especial profit to the gazer; and I would have it worked in this sort. There should be yourself, and I, your approved friend and companion in arms, giving two of the villains furious battle; and in a little way off our brave kinsman—another famous pillar of knighthood—shall be putting to flight the other two rascals away from their expected victim, who shall be lying prostrate under a tree, where she hath been left, in a very moving tribulation. A little way from this we will have a second picture, with the villains making off in the distance—the lady now in a pretty fright and bewilderment, looking about her with Master Chaplain, Master Antiquarian, and our young scholar, as country persons natural of those parts, gazing at her with exceeding curiousness, whilst her three valiant champions shall stand, leaning on their weapons, as though they were amazed at beholding such heavenly grace in so pagan a place."

"Never heard I so brave a limner!" exclaimed the other in the like pleasant humour; "why thou wouldst beat the cunningest master of the art out of the field. O' my life, in thy hand the painted cloth would be more moving than history; and we should speedily have all lovers of true valour, instead of seeking the enemy's encampment, studying lessons of knighthood from thy arras."

"Well, I should be right glad to know what hath become of her," said Sir Valentine. "I like not parting so quickly with so rare an acquaintance, I promise you. Nevertheless, methinks 'tis marvellous such a strange person as that Sir Thomas Lucy should have so exquisite a daughter. Had he been in any way civil, I would have bestowed some pains to please him, shrivelled pippin as he looks to be; but he spoke so sharply to the gentle creature, and looked at us with so crabbed an expression, that I was in haste to be quit of his company; therefore I have been in perfect ignorance up to this date where she is to be found."

"I have at least discovered the old fellow's residence," said Sir Reginald.

"Ha, indeed!" cried Sir Valentine in a famous exultation. "Perdie, that is excellent news. Where doth the pagan place so fair a jewel? Tell me, I prythee, for I would impawn my heart to get but another sight of her."

"Marry, but I think 'tis impawned already, good cousin," observed his friend with an arch smile. "Thou seemest so monstrous eager on the matter; but not to baulk thy exceeding curiousness, for my humour jumps with it, believe me,—know that this peerless damsel hath her bower at Charlcote, where the knight of despite, her father, holdeth his court."

"To horse, for Charlcote, ho!" exclaimed his young companion, rising from his seat in a merry manner, as if impatient to be gone.

"But let me advise thee of sufficient caution," said his kinsman, with an admirable mock gravity; "great dangers beset thy path. Ogres, giants, basilisks, and dragons await thee on every side. Horror will cross thy steps; despair dog thy heels; revenge cometh on thy right hand, and cruelty on thy left. By my valour, sir knight, methinks thou hadst best refrain from so perilous an adventure."

"Amor vincit omnia!" replied the other after the same pleasant fashion; and thus jesting and bantering, the two friends a few minutes after, left our young scholar—who had drunk in every word of their discourse—to pursue his studies in solitude. Little more of the book before him attempted he acquaintance with for some time before and long after their leaving him. He thought, and the more he thought the more thoughtful he grew; but his thoughts were as gossamer webs hovering over a field, that catch nought but other webs of a like sort; they appeared moreover to have no purport; they went in no direct path; but proceeded over and across, around and about, always returning to the starting point,—and what should that be but the same fair creature he had seen at Kenilworth, that the gay knights had talked of in such delicate terms.

In the meanwhile, at all proper intervals, he assisted his father as far as in him lay; at other times running of errands with an alacrity and cheerfulness none could help admiring. John Shakspeare strove all that an honest man could to keep his family in comfort. He would seek to do a little in his old trade of wool, and also something as a glover; but though thrift and diligence were twin companions with him at all times, the expenses of a family would often run him down at heel. Perchance, however desirous he might be to pay as he went, and no man more so, it might happen when the baker called there was no money. Mortgaging a small property brought him by his wife carried him on a little; but this could not last for ever, do what he would; and it became no uncommon thing when he was ready for his dinner, to have no dinner ready for him. His neighbours were ever willing to lend him a helping hand; but having experienced their friendly feeling in some measure, he liked not letting them know he required it again, fearing to exhaust their goodness. All that our young scholar gained by friendly gifts was presented to his parents as speedily as he could: and be sure he felt more exquisite gratification in so bestowing it, than he experienced in any other thing whatsoever; but it sometimes happened when he was at Sir Marmaduke's, or other bountiful friends, before a goodly meal, the thought that his loving parents had at that time nothing of the sort to put before them, would so move him he could not touch a morsel of any thing, however tempting it might be. And as for his good mother and father, they cared more their son should keep a decent appearance, so that he might do no discredit to his company, than they heeded their own comforts.

Methinks there cannot be in nature so truly pitiful, and yet a sight so noble withal, as an honest man struggling with adversity. Note how he labours to bear up his heart against the crushing weight of his stern necessities. See his nature—a proud nature, perchance, for there is no pride like that of honesty—reduced to the mean resorts of poverty's most absolute rule. Behold the fallacious smile and abortive cheerfulness under which he would strive to hide the iron entering into his soul! Want winds her serpent folds around him, and eats into his vitals; Ruin hovers over him on vulture's wings to seize him for her prey; Disgrace points at him; Shame follows on his steps; and Fear seeks to disturb the pleasant shelter of his dreams; but the honest man holds up his head like a flag upon a wreck; and, when that rude villain Death would take the wall of him, doffs his beaver with a natural dignity mere gallantry can shew no example of.

Such was it with John Shakspeare. He did his best, but his best failed. He put forth all his strength, but all his strength was insufficient. The brand of poverty appeared to have marked him for her own; but worse than that to him, he saw his wife pining, and his children wanting nourishment. In such a state of things it might have been thought that he would have made application to some of the persons of worship in his neighbourhood, whose characters were a guarantee it would not have been made in vain; but worthy persons when they fall to those poor shifts as render such an act necessary, are found monstrous loath to trouble the rich and powerful with their necessities. Sir Marmaduke doubtless would have very readily done him such service; but he had no intimation his assistance was required; William Shakspeare always making such an appearance, by means already spoken of, which prevented him from entertaining any suspicions his father was in any other but comfortable circumstances; and the poor glover, however meanly off he might be, could never bring himself to hazard his son's prospects with so great a friend by importuning of the latter with his own hapless condition.

At last, after a protracted struggle with himself on the matter, and things getting to wear a more serious aspect, he made up his mind he would venture to move his old friend John a Combe. Strange rumours had been afloat for some time concerning of this good gentleman. On a sudden he had been missed from Stratford, and after some years' stay, had again returned—but oh, how altered a man! Those who saw him scarce knew him, and those whom he saw he seemed determined he would not know. It was said there were such marked lines in his pallid countenance, as though a thousand cares had ploughed their furrows in the flesh, and that when he walked abroad, which was something rare in him, he would mingle with none, greet none, be known of none—but move slowly along, with his body bent, and his eyes fixed sullenly on the ground, sometimes moving of his lips—though what fell from them none could say. It was also reported that he had become an usurer—lending of his money at exorbitant charges, and being exceeding strict in forcing the payment. Not a word of this would John Shakspeare believe. What, that noble heart become a selfish solitary, he had known of so social a spirit—or that generous nature debase itself with avarice, he had seen risking the horriblest death out of pure philanthropy! It was clean impossible. They must grossly belie him who reported of him any such meanness. So thought the poor glover of his old acquaintance, and with these thoughts he one morning took his staff in his hand and proceeded to his dwelling.

At his first entrance at the gate, John Shakspeare saw that there was at least a notable change in the house once so familiar to him. Every thing around and about it looked strange and desolate, and as opposite to the state in which it used to be kept, as any two things could chance to be. The fair garden that once was the pride of the place for its order and trimness, appeared now a mere heap of weeds, straggling bushes, and withered plants. The goodly trees that were wont to be so well trailed against the wall, had broke from their bindings, and lay with their straggling branches almost leafless, with the unchecked ravages of ruin and neglect. The dwelling seemed no less wretched. A broken casement, and a porch dirty and crumbling with decay, spoke how little outward appearances were now cared for by the possessor. John Shakspeare shook his head at noting of these things. It then occurred to him that some fearful change must have taken place in John a Combe, else John a Combe's dwelling could never have come to so pitiful a condition.

The door was cautiously opened by a sour-looking slovenly old dame, instead of the neat pretty handmaid, and active young serving man, that had used to have been so ready to shew a visitor all proper courtesy, and after sharply interrogating him on his business, she led him through the hall—where every thing spoke a similar story of indifferency to all comfort and cleanliness, as did the ruined garden and delapidated porch—into a small back chamber choking with dust. Here before a heap of many papers and parchments, sat his worthy and esteemed friend Master Combe. John Shakspeare looked with greater intentness ere he would believe his own eyes. He saw before him a man he knew to be in the pride of manhood, with all the externals of decrepid age. The grey hair, the blanched cheek, and the sunken eye, could not be mistaken: but besides these unwelcome signs, there was in his aspect a mingled expression of agony and distrust, that was more moving than all. John Shakspeare's honest heart sunk within him, as he beheld this painful spectacle, which exhibited the more wretchedness, by the mean habiliments in which it appeared,—for he who had used to dress in so becoming a fashion, he was admired of all, was now attired in coarse clothes and uncleanly linen, unworthy of a person even of the lowest quality.

Master Combe stared at his old friend without the slightest sign of cordiality, or even of recognition; and seemed as though he would have him say his errand without delay; whereupon his visitor, though more distressed at such a moment at the condition of one he had known to be so good a man, than his own, presently gave an unvarnished tale of his losses and sufferings, and the stern necessity which had compelled him to ask a loan to afford him some present help. Master Combe sat the tale out with a stone-like indifference.

"What security hast got?" said he at last, rather sharply.

"None," replied his visitor, much pained at hearing of so unexpected a question.

"What, come to me seeking of money without security!" exclaimed Master Combe, as if in a monstrous surprise. "Dost not know I am an usurer, and dost not know usurers lend not, save on sure grounds and profitable terms? I must have ten in the hundred, and I must have something to hold upon of such value as will ensure the safety of the loan."

"Alack, I have it not," answered John Shakspeare, marvelling the generous nature of his old companion should have taken so ill a turn. "I expected not you were so changed, else I would not have troubled you."

"Changed!" cried the other with a bitter emphasis. "Marry, yes, and a goodly change it must needs be. What, wouldst suppose I would remain all my days the generous confiding fool I have once been? Have I not given without stint—have I not endured without flinching for the good of my fellows, and none ends else? Lived I not in the strong belief of the excellence of humanity, and sought all means to shew I was myself a parcel of the whole? What good thing have I left undone that was in my power? Where have I failed in the exercise of an impartial benevolence? When gave I not every one his due, or kept myself back when one unjustly used required a defender?"

"Never, as I gladly testify," exclaimed his companion.

"And what hath been my profit?" enquired Master Combe, still more bitterly, as he rose from his seat in an increasing excitement; "hopes blighted, health ruined, and happiness destroyed! Look on me—see you one particle of what I was? Yet is the change without, in no comparison with that which is within. My whole nature is blasted, riven, and torn up by the roots. Not a green leaf shall you find on it, search where you will. Not a sign of any goodness whatsoever. An earthquake hath trampled on me—a pestilence hath eaten up all the pure essence of my being—what is human of me is stifled, poisoned, crushed, and cast out of all likeness with humanity. I am a moving desolation—a living desert—a well that the scorching air hath left dry as a stone."

John Shakspeare looked on and listened, quite forgetful of his own wretchedness.

"See you that spider in the crack?" enquired Master Combe, suddenly taking the other by the arm.

"Ay, I see it plain," replied he, looking narrowly to the spot pointed out.

"He is spinning his web in the ruin around him," continued his companion, as if in some sort of exultation. "He means to make prey of all he can. John Shakspeare, I am intent upon a like thing," added he, sinking his voice to a mere whisper. "Take heed of yourself, else you will find yourself in my snare. To the door with what speed you have."

John Shakspeare, so moved he scarce knew what he was about, took up his cap; but, finding it feel unusually heavy, looked in it with some narrowness, and there, to his great surprise, saw a purse of money.

"How came this here?" exclaimed he, taking it in his hand. "As I live, there was nought of the kind in my cap a moment since, when I laid it down."

"How should I know, i'faith?" cried Master Combe, sharply.

"It must needs belong to you, worthy sir, for it cannot be mine," said his companion, seeking to give him the purse.

"Marry, what new folly is this!" exclaimed the other, putting it away. "Dost think I would give thee such? Doth usurers part with their money after such fashion? Fanciest I would allow of thy spreading the rare intelligence amongst thy acquaintance, that John a Combe is as monstrous a fool as ever he was, and liketh nought so well as helping some one in his need? Go get thee gone, John Shakspeare," added he, pushing his companion to the door, "thou art honest, and must needs be a fool—thou hast no lack of virtue, therefore cannot escape being taken for a knave;" and in the next moment the door was closed upon him.

CHAPTER XII.

Over my altars hath he hung his lance,
His battered shield, his uncontrolled crest,
And for my sake hath learned to sport and dance,
To toy, to wanton, dally, smile, and jest.

SHAKSPEARE.

Take heed, sweet nymph, try not thy shaft,
Each little touch will pierce a heart;
Alas! thou know'st not Cupid's craft,
Revenge is joy, the end is smart.

DAVISON.

But what on earth can long abide in state?
Or who can him assure of happy day?
Sith morning fair may bring foul evening late,
And least mishap the most blessed alter may?
For thousand perils lie in close await
About us daily to work our decay,
That none except a god, or God him guide,
May them avoid or remedy provide.

SPENSER.

"I THINK it exceeding improper of thee, Mabel!" exclaimed Dame Lucy, with a countenance of more than ordinary gravity, whilst she walked in the grounds appertaining to her husband's mansion at Charlcote, in all her pride of farthingale and head-tire.

"What else could I do, I pray you, dear mistress?" said the fair creature, in a deprecating tone, following of her closely. "These good gentlemen would needs speak with me, and surely there was no offence in their speech."

"O, monstrous! beyond all doubting," replied the dame. "Thou canst have no conception, child, what offence may be in speech without it being visible. There are meanings in words that are horrible to think of, albeit they appear of ever such innocency."

"I took it but as mere greeting," added her companion, in some surprise at what had fallen from the other. "They were infinitely kind in their enquiries; and so courteous withal, it is hard to believe anything uncivil of them."

"Trust not to such kindness," said her mistress, somewhat oracularly, "'tis a poor stale to catch woodcocks. I marvel what such fine fellows should want of so poor a person! No good, by my fay! Doubtless, would they seek to fill thee with foolish fantasies improper for thy humble station, and so turn it to their advantages. But methinks I have given them a right proper reception. I showed them such dignity of behaviour as proved how little I thought of them and their fine words. They will not come here again, I'll warrant."

"Dost not think, dear mistress, 'twas marvellous good of them to rescue me from the hands of those rude persons who were for taking me away, I know not where, whilst we were at Kenilworth?"

"Nay, o' my life, I know not," replied the dame, "I cannot speak of that of which I have no certain knowledge. Perchance, if the truth could be come at, more mischief would be found in those who stayed thee, than in those who were for carrying thee off. I liked not their looks. They have a horrible suspicious appearance with them."

"I saw it not, believe me," said her young companion. "Indeed, they did appear to me the noblest, kindest, honourablest young gentlemen, it hath ever been my good hap to meet."

"Tilly vally, stuff o'nonsense, child!" exclaimed Dame Lucy, with some sharpness. "Marry, how shouldst know aught concerning of honourable young gentlemen; and what dost want with such? Prythee, hold thy silly prate. Thou wilt have enough to do to get thy bread with an honest name, without troubling thyself with any such improper matters. Honourable young gentlemen, forsooth! The world must be clean topsy turvy, when persons of thy quality take to such notions."

The poor foundling was silenced, and the two continued their walk without ever a word more; yet though her tongue was at rest, her thoughts were right busy. Obedient as she was, and yielding as was her nature, nothing of what her companion had said, had convinced her, the handsome gallants who had so bravely rescued her from she knew not what peril, and that, after so long a time—hearing where she lived, had gone on purpose to enquire how she had fared after her great alarm—had treated her with such extreme courteousness, were anything but truly noble gentlemen, who meant her well. Doubtless it was something new to her to be treated with delicate respect by persons of quality, as they appeared; for she was only regarded as a servant, and only associated with such, save at those times she was attending of her mistress; therefore the impression they made upon her might have been more powerful than could have been produced under ordinary circumstances. Women in general, and especially of the younger sort, who have been used to be meanly thought of, are wonderfully grateful for any slight courtesy from a superior, and are ready to give all their hearts for such attentions, should they believe them to be sincere; and Mabel, whose gentle nature was overflowing with gratitude at any kindness, took, at the most liberal appreciation, the attentions of the two young knights.

Certes, Mabel continued to think very kindly of Sir Valentine and his friend, and was famously glad she had met with them again; for ever since she had first formed their acquaintance, she had wished she might see them once more, and now she had a second time beheld them, she hoped it might chance they would again meet. She thought not one whit more of one than of the other; she felt she should desire to be well esteemed of both. In accordance with such feelings, whenever she could get away from the old dame for a walk by herself, she would direct her steps toward the spot where she had last met her brave deliverers. Mayhap it was chance which led her that way; but as it occurred every time she was for a stroll in the park, methinks it was of that order of chances which savour marvellously of design. But it so happened these walks of hers ended as they had commenced. She met not those whose company she desired, and she began to think such great pleasure could never be hers again.

Some months after the interview to which allusion hath just been made, she was returning homewards from her ordinary ramble, somewhat out of heart at her many disappointments, when, to her wonderful great exultation, she suddenly espied Sir Valentine wending his way towards her through the trees. The young knight made his greeting with all the courtesy of a true soldier, gazing with most admiring glances on the fair creature before him, who, to his thinking, had grown to be infinitely more beautiful even than when he had last had sight of her; but the truth was, she was now all smiles, gladness, and animation—happiness was beaming in her sunny glances, and pleasure basked in the soft hollows of her radiant cheek. Such sweet simplicity, such genuine truth,—so artless and unworldly a nature Sir Valentine had had no knowledge of; and he, whose truly chivalrous disposition was so ready to take on trust the admirable qualities of woman, could not fail to appreciate such excellences as he now beheld in his personal acquaintance. He looked he could never tire of such exquisite company. His handsome smiling features spoke what absolute satisfaction he was then and there enjoying; and the longer he stayed in her bewitching presence, the less inclined appeared he to take himself away from it.

As for Mabel, nought in this world could equal the exceeding pleasantness she experienced in listening to her companion's soft mellow voice and polished delivery, describing to her such of the princely pleasures of Kenilworth she had not beheld. She entirely forgot she was a poor despised foundling, and in her fantasy accompanied her eloquent companion through all the glorious pageantries, noble banquets, and courtly recreations, that were enjoyed by the noble company at the castle, as though they had been her customary and most familiar pastimes, from the beginning of her earliest remembrances. I question she would have been as properly entertained with the reality of what she heard, as was she with their mere narration; but when the narrator digressed from his subject in any manner, to express, with winning civilness, his great comfort at having been so fortunate as to have made her acquaintance—which he thought more of than could he a thousand Kenilworths—a thrill of exquisite rapture seemed to pass through her whole nature, and she would return her thanks for such estimation with a heartiness that shewed clearly whence it proceeded. This continued as they remained strolling carelessly along under those shady trees, without taking the slightest heed of time, till the thickening shadows gave them warning how long they had dallied with the hours. Then some sign of separation became manifest.

"Let me beg one favour at your hands, ere I depart from your sweet presence," said Sir Valentine, as he was still lingering by her side near the park gate.

"In truth, good sir, I would grant you anything in my poor power," answered his fair companion.

"It is but to know your name," added he.

"O' my word now, good sir, have you not known it all this time?" enquired she, as if in some little surprise. "Surely I am no other than Mabel, of whom all persons, methinks, have some knowledge."

"Mabel!" repeated the young knight, somewhat to himself as it were, yet all the time gazing on the ingenuous countenance of his fair partner, as though he was conning it for some pleasant task,—then added, with a deep expression in the words, "I will not forget it."

"But, I pray you, give me knowledge of *your* name!" exclaimed Mabel, with a most pressing earnestness, "an' you think it not over bold in me to ask such a thing of you; for, in very truth, I should be exceeding glad to know it."

"I am called Valentine de Largesse," replied he, charmed with the exquisite fashion in which the question had been put to him.

"How good a creature!" said the gentle girl to herself, as she was returning home after he had left her. "Valentine de Largesse! 'Tis a name that meaneth all honourableness and true valour, I will be bound for't. How strange of Dame Lucy to think there could be evil intent in any such!"

This was not the only meeting they had under those shady trees. Sir Valentine was too well pleased with his last interview not to desire to repeat his visit, and in consequence of his friend Sir Reginald being absent in a distant part of the country, he had such leisure as enabled him, when all other circumstances concurred, to realise his own wishes as often as he would. His behaviour began imperceptibly to take upon it the character of that tender gallantry, with which it was customary among the more chivalrous sort of gentlemen, to address their sovereign lady. His homage knew no bounds—his respect was equally without limits, and his admiration, though the powerfulest of the three, was of that choice sort which is shewn more in delicate actions than in a fair commodity of terms. These attentions gave the gentle Mabel a pride in herself she had never experienced before, which increased as she grew more familiar with them. As it made progress did her simplicity diminish; and she presently took such things, albeit they had once been so new to her, as if they were what she looked for, and was properly entitled to receive.

Yet did this pride sit upon her as gracefully as it might upon the noblest lady in the land. When at her humble duties, she was no more to all appearance than a poor foundling; but after tiring of herself with such genuine taste as to make her poor apparel look more becomingly on her, than regal garments would on many others, she stood by the side of Sir Valentine receiving his devotions, with so courtly an air as made her seem quite another creature. Her step was firm, her brow erect, her carriage stately, and her look spoke of such proud happiness as a noble maiden might experience in attracting to herself the exclusive attentions of some princely gallant. At times it was evident she had lost all knowledge of her humble fortunes. Indeed her behaviour was of such a sort her companion not only had not the slightest suspicion she was of so low a station—but he more and more marvelled such unmannerly strange persons as Sir Thomas and Dame Lucy appeared to him, could have so noble a daughter. Mabel never gave the matter a thought, else, had she suspected any such thing, her ingenuous nature would have led her to undeceive him on the instant. She was gratified with his company out of all doubt, but she saw nothing beyond the present moment; and although these meetings were clandestine, and, as she had good reason for believing, against the consent of the old knight and his lady, as there appeared no offence in what she did, she could not see she had done any.

It was her good fortune during all this time to escape suspicion at home—for her well-disposedness was so familiar to them, that her conduct was never enquired into, and as her great trouble and annoyance, young Lucy, was at college, she was in the enjoyment of more happiness than she had known her whole life long. Pity such felicity should be of such short endurance. But so is it ever—nothing is certain save uncertainty, which sheweth its troublesomeness just at those times we are least prepared to put up with it. Often and often is it we see in the sweet spring-time of the year, a goodly tree almost hid beneath its innumerable fair blossoms, giving such prodigal promise of fruit as maketh the owner's heart leap with joy—a frost cometh in the night, the blossoms are nipped, shrivelled, and cast off, and the tree remaineth with nothing but barren branches for all that season. Methinks the knowledge of this should keep the sanguine from too steadfast an expectation; but what availeth all knowledge against disposition?—a score of times shall such meet with the terriblest disappointments, and the next day shall find them hoping, trusting, and anticipating, with greater earnestness than ever. This, however, could not be said of Mabel, for she anticipated nothing; and, as hath been said, looked only upon the present moment. She was scarce of an age to trouble herself much about the future, and the extreme humility of her fortunes kept her from anything that savoured of ambition. The innocency of her heart was her best buckler in this apparent lack of foresight. Proud she was it cannot be denied, but hers was the pure essence of pride, and not the dross.

As she was returning from her usual stroll, though without meeting with her usual gratification, she came upon a sight which fixed her attention so profoundly, she could not stir from the place. It was in the pleasant twilight of the first month of autumn, when the heated air, fanned by the seasonable breeze, was growing to a pleasant coolness, and the rustling groves were donning their embroidered livery. Over head was all of a clear grey, save in the west a rich copper hue was visible at the verge, gradually fading till it took the colour of the surrounding sky. The herbage was crisp and short, and the flowers had got to be of some rareness. Low upon the mossy lap of the venerablest oak in the whole grove, lay a youth in the most absolute perfection of youthful symmetry. Surely he might, without any great stretch of fancy, have been taken for that lovely boy who playeth such vagaries with our humanity, as poets feign ; and she, who crept to him on tiptoe with such a marvelling, pleased, and cautious look upon her exquisite fair features, would have made an admirable representative of that divine creature the spiritual Psyche of the same ideal world. He slept—one arm supporting his head from which the hat had fallen, the other holding an open book. And who could this be but the youthful Shakspeare, wearied out with the long deep studiousness he now, more than ever, indulged in. She however had no knowledge of who it was, but could not help gazing with a pleasant wonder upon the pale thoughtful brow, and delicately beautiful countenance of the young sleeper.

All at once the expression of her features changed exceedingly. She now looked all fear and terrible anxiety. The cause of this was she beheld a hornet hovering over his face, seeming every moment as if it would alight on the half closed lips, wose luscious richness of colour doubtless tempted it thereto. Mabel was in an agony of dread that the touch of the insect would cause the young student to start, and so he would get stung : and she dared not seek to wake him from a like fear. So there stood she, bending forward with extreme anxiousness, and anon shrinking back with horrible affright. This continued for some moments, with increasing alarm on her part, when with such a lively sense of joy as had visited her but seldom, she beheld the hornet take its departure without doing of any mischief. She lingered a moment longer, half inclined to wake the sleeper, and tell him of his danger, but as she could not bring upon herself to break such sweet slumbers as he appeared to enjoy, she presently turned away and continued her walk.

She knew not all this while that she was narrowly watched by two persons, who, creeping from tree to tree with such cautiousness as might prevent their approach being noticed, followed her closely as she went.

" 'Tis her !" whispered one, drawing close to the other.

" Let her get to the next clump of trees, and then upon her," answered the other, in the same low voice. They then separated again, and crept along as before till they had passed the sleeper some paces, and were rapidly, but cautiously advancing upon the object of their so much regard, when Mabel, turning round to take a last glance at the sleeping student, to her monstrous surprise and alarm, found two strange men close upon her footsteps.

" I pray you come with us, sweet damsel," said one of them, whom she immediately recognized as her treacherous gallant at Kenilworth. " We will do you no sort of harm should you come quietly—for we are of your friends, anxious to lead you to such great good fortune as falleth to the lot of few. But if you shew any unwillingness," added he, seizing her firmly by the wrist, seeing she evinced an evident reluctance to be of his company—" or make any outcry, we shall be forced to use such means to compel you, as you would find of the roughest."

"Unhand me, sirrah!" cried Mabel, indignantly, striving to free her arm from his hold. "I have seen enough of you to wish for no further acquaintance, and will go with you on no account."

"Then we must e'en take to making you, sweetest," replied he, catching her up in his arms, as though he would carry her away, which set her to screaming and struggling with all her might. At this moment, awakened by the scream, the youthful Shakspeare started from his sleep, and to his extreme consternation beheld the fair object of his most pleasant dream borne away from him, struggling in the arms of some rude villain.

"Hold, caitiff, on thy life!" shouted he, starting after them, with such speed of foot as soon brought them within his reach, but just as he had bravely seized the ravisher by the collar of his doublet, he was felled to the earth by a blow from a heavy riding whip the other villain had with him. The two then made what haste they could with their burthen, despite her cries and resistance, till they came to their horses under some adjoining trees. The gallant got on one, holding Mabel before him, then when his companion was mounted, both rode across the country, at a pace which speedily took them out of that neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XIII.

O fortune, now my wounds redress,
And help me from my smart,
It cometh well of gentleness,
To ease a mourning hearte.

OLD SONG.

Away with these self-loving lads,
Whom Cupid's arrow never glads!
Away poor souls that sigh and weep
In love of those that lie asleep!
For Cupid is a merry god,
And forceth none to kiss the rod.

LORD BROOKE.

These strange and sudden injuries have fallen
So thick upon me, that I lose all sense
Of what they are. Methinks I am not wrong'd;
Nor is it aught, if from the censuring world
It can but hide it. Reputation!
Thou art a word, no more.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

ON recovering consciousness, the youthful Shakspeare found himself lying stretched on the grass, with a confused sense of pain and sickness, which prevented him from forming any distinct idea of where he was. He could just discern divers black masses of sundry shapes, moving around and about him, whilst above, myriards of stars were twinkling upon the surface of the surrounding sky; a thick white haze floated over the grassy earth as far as he could see; and not a sound, save the rustling of the leaves,—which at first came upon his ear with a most unnatural strangeness—could be heard. His earliest perception was that the ground was wet with the dews, and he almost immediately afterwards discovered that his clothes were saturated with the same moisture. This made him make an immediate attempt to rise, whereupon he felt that his limbs were stiff and aching. Sitting, supporting himself by one arm, he strove to ascertain where he was; but every thing upon which he turned his eyes floated in such shadowy outline, he could distinguish nothing; and so fearful a pain was in his head, he was forced to lean it upon his hand as he rested his elbow on his lap. He then found his brows covered with a clammy moisture, which stuck to his palm with a peculiar unpleasantness, and an overpowering sense of sickness prevented him from attempting to regain his feet. In this position, and with these sensations, he remained for some time.

Nature appeared, in the rising dews beneath her starry canopy, like to some mighty empress lying in her shroud under a jewelled pall; but this awful magnificence was now lost upon him, who at any other time would have seen and felt it more thoroughly than could any other. In his present state she might have put on herself her proudest apparelling, and he would have paid no more heed to it than if he had had no foreknowledge of her visible existence; and for the time being, in his comprehension, not only all this glorious garnishing, in which he had oft taken such exquisite delight, was utterly done away with, but that absolute and unrivalled Beauty, whose infinite attractions so set off, had bound his spirit to her will, seemed to have suffered a perfect dissolution into the elements from which she sprung; and had at once become a darkness—a chaos—and a nothing. This, however, as must be manifest to all, was mere fantasy. The chaos lay in the mind, and not in Nature; who, however funereally she may choose to array herself, hath a perpetual life, that cannot be made the property either of Time or of Death. All the singular fine faculties and curious conceptions of the young student, in the state of half-consciousness in which he now existed, were as if they had never been; and in intelligence—alack that there should be so humiliating a truth,—a sudden visitation of physical pain had reduced the promising scholar below the level of the most unlettered hind.

At last he managed to raise himself upon his feet, and leaned against the trunk of a tree close by which he had fallen. He looked around, and it appeared as though every thing wore an unfamiliar and unfriendly countenance; helpless and faint with pain, he turned his appealing gaze to those fair ministers on high, who, at such numberless occasions, had looked down so invitingly on his meditations; but they seemed at this present to regard him with a cold indifference which struck a chill to his heart. He felt weaker and weaker every moment; the mists appeared to be thickening around him so that he could scarce breathe; the tree passed away from his touch; the ground slipped from under his feet; and with a look of anguish that was a most deep reproach unto Nature for having so abandoned him in his extremity, he again fell out of all sign of existence.

At this moment lights were seen in the distance, and a confused shouting of men and barking of dogs was plainly audible. Amid this the name of Mabel might be distinguished, called out by several different voices, and other cries, which proved that the party were in search of the poor foundling.

"Mabel!" shouted Sir Thomas Lucy, some yards off, as loud as he could for the wrapper his careful dame had put round his throat to protect him from the damp mist. "Murrain on the wench, what hath become of her I wonder?"

"Hoy!" bawled out a stout old game-keeper for the space of nigh half a minute, carrying of a lanthorn, which great cry of his brought on such a fit of coughing, there seemed to be no end of it.

"Prythee, when we return, good Sampson, ask some of my julep of me," said Dame Lucy, who prided herself hugely on her skill in medicaments, and was ever as anxious to lay hold of a patient as was any 'pothecary in the land; "'tis famous for the cure of all manner of coughs, asthmatics, quinsies, colds, hoarseness, and other diseases of the like sort,—so if thou wilt take it steadily it cannot help to be a sovereign remedy for thy asthma."

"Ay, mistress, an' it please you," replied Sampson, although he knew full well the virtues of that same julep, having had it put upon him for a good score years, let him have whatever complaint he might.

"A fig for such villanous stuff!" exclaimed Sir Thomas; "I'll cure thy asthmatics, I'll warrant! When I was at college, I was as famous for my studies in medicine as was any physician of them all. Indeed, I got me the name of little Esculapius, I had acquired such great cunning in it. There was no such cures ever heard of as I have made. But it led me so into the playing of tricks, that I was obliged to give it up, or I should have been expelled for my many mischiefs. Oh, the love powders I have made, that distressed damsels came to me for! Oh, the wonderful charmed philtres, and magical elixirs, I have given them for bringing back their stray lovers. By cock and pye, I tickled them so with my stuff, that if a man of any kind, whatever he might lack in handsomeness, did but shew himself in the High Street, women of all ages, sorts, and conditions, rushed from every house with a monstrous uncontrollable eagerness, intent upon the having him whether he would or no."

"By'r lady, I never heard this before, Sir Thomas!" cried his dame, in some surprise, yet in the fullest conviction, here was another wonderful proof of her husband's extraordinary rare wisdom. "Believe me, had I known of it, I would have asked your advice numberless times when I have not."

"Mabel!" shouted the knight again, and again Sampson set up a prolonged cry, and half choked himself in the midst of it, and two dogs they had with them recommenced barking, as if they thought their voices stood as good a chance of being recognised by their kind friend, the poor foundling, as any.

"Plague on't!" exclaimed Sir Thomas; "I am nigh hoarse with bawling; and despite of our mufflers and other covering, I doubt not we shall have terrible colds from wandering about here when the dew is so thick."

"Ay, Master Justice," observed the gamekeeper, scarce ceasing one minute to give evidence this coming out agreed not with his asthma.

"I marvel she should serve us this way," added the knight, after another call from him, another broken-winded cry from his man, and another famous howl from the two dogs, with as little success as had attended them all along; "I hope no harm hath come to her."

"By my troth, a thought strikes me!" cried Dame Lucy, suddenly coming to a full stop in her walk, to the exceeding astonishment of the justice and his man.

"Marry, I hope 'twill strike thee hard enough to tell us what 'tis about," said her husband, merrily.

"Doubtless that pestilent fine fellow hath run away with her," added she, as if horror-struck at the idea.

"Ey, who? What fine fellow?" exclaimed the knight, rapidly; "run away with a servant of a justice o' the peace! 'Slight! 'tis as heinous a matter as sheep-stealing! But who's the villain? 'Fore George; if he be a low person, he shall swing for't; and if he be one of any sort of quality, I'll make a star-chamber matter on't. I will be no rearer of coneys for other men's catching, I promise you." And thereupon he thumped the ground with the end of his stick a most determined blow.

"Nay, good heart, be not in so deadly a passion," cried the good dame, earnestly.

"Passion!" bawled the justice, in a louder voice, and seemingly in an increased rage. "Wounds! but methinks here is fine occasion for it. It is but fitting I should be in a passion—in a horrible, tearing passion, at such a villanous affront as this. O' my life, I should be monstrous glad now to do some deadly mischief." And at this he pulled his rapier a little out of the sheath, and then sent it back with a whang that sounded fearfully to his alarmed wife and astonished game-keeper.

"I pray you, take not on so murderously, Sir Thomas," cried the good dame.

"Valour o' me! tell me this caitiff on the instant!" exclaimed the knight, in a voice that appeared to admit of no dallying.

"He was one of those who made themselves so busy with Mabel whilst we were at Kenilworth," replied the old lady, tremblingly; "but he cannot be a fit object for the receiving of your just indignation."

"Ha! Is it so?" cried Sir Thomas, in no way abating the terribleness of his anger. "O' my word, I did suspect them of no good. 'Twas a trick, I'll wager my life on't—a cozening trick to get them into my good-will; but I go not so easily into a trap, I promise you. I saw the bait, and did imagine the mischief on the instant. How dost feel so certain one of them hath carried off our Mabel?" asked he, and at this the good dame up and told, how one day she was walking with Mabel in the park, and they were accosted by these same fine fellows with a marvellous show of delicate behaviour; but she, giving them instant proof she was not to be deceived by their craftiness, they departed from her presence with more speed than they had come in it. Then the knight became more brave in his speech than ever, and was talking very largely how he would have driven them both out of his grounds at the very point of his rapier, had he been in her company at that time, when his attention was suddenly diverted from the subject in hand, by a strange barking of the dogs a little in advance of them. Sampson made haste to the spot, with his lantern to see what it meant.

"Perchance the dogs have found her," observed Dame Lucy; "and it may be she hath been taken with a fit, or sudden swooning, and so could get no further."

"Murder!" cried Sampson as loud as he could, upon catching a glance, by aid of the light he carried, of what appeared to be a dead body.

"Oh, the poor wench!" exclaimed the good dame in very doleful accents.

"What dost say, knave?" inquired the knight, in somewhat of a trepidation.

"Here's a horrid mangle!" bawled the serving-man, gazing with real terror on the blood-stained face of the youthful Shakspeare.

"Thou shalt not go, Sir Thomas!" cried his dame in a nervous apprehension, clinging tightly to his arm. "Perchance the murderers may not be far away. Keep down thy valour, dear heart, I prythee! Nay, sweet life, thou shalt go on no account! Thy brave spirit will lead thee to some hurt; thou hast no occasion to be so exceeding valiant. Remember, chuck! thou art getting to be old, and no fit match for I know not how many monstrous horrible cut-throat villains who may be lurking about."

"Shall a justice o' the peace stand playing of mumchance, when murder stalks abroad?" exclaimed Sir Thomas, who, believing that the supposed villains must by this have got them to some place of safety, had drawn his rapier, and was advancing with a marvellous shew of resolution as fast as Dame Lucy would allow him. "Must Sir Thomas Lucy, knight of the shire, and late sheriff of the county, hide his valour, when deadly mischief is a doing on his own land? Dame! dame! I will not be hindered; I feel as full of fight as a drawn badger; my valour must spend itself. Where are the monstrous pitiful caitiffs that have done this mischief? 'Fore George! I will slay them every man!"

"Hodge! Anthony! David!" cried his dame urgently to divers of the serving-men and keepers who were at a little distance behind. "Help me hold thy master. Here is a foul murder done upon poor Mabel, and he is so moved, he must needs be attacking of all the murderers at once." The men came up in wonderful tribulation at hearing of the fate of the gentle foundling; and with pressing entreaties to their master he would not wilfully seek his own death. They sought to hold him fast ; but the more he was held, the more boldly he threatened. At last they all arrived at the spot where Sampson and the dogs were examining with extreme curiousness the body of our young scholar.

"Ha ! how is this?" exclaimed the knight in exceeding astonishment, as soon as he beheld the young Shakspeare, by the aid of the lanterns. "This is no Mabel ; this is some boy or another."

"I warrant you, master," observed one of the men gladly, "our Mabel hath darker hair."

"And she wore not jerkins of any kind," said another.

"Nor trunks, that ever I saw," added a third.

"'Tis not our Mabel, out of all doubt !" cried Dame Lucy, gazing upon the motionless body with mingled feelings of awe and curiousness. "I never gave her to wear any such clothes as these; and such as she had of me for her apparelling were honest gowns of a sober colour, with petticoats of a proper stuff, blue hose, and shoes of a fair strength, with a round hat, for every day ; and then for Sundays——"

"Gog's wouns!—he lives, master!" hurriedly exclaimed Sampson, who had lifted up the head of the supposed corpse, and feeling him move, could not forbear crying out—the which completely put a stop to the dame's account of her handmaid's wardrobe.

"Mass! he breathes, sure enough," observed Hodge ; "and that, as I have been told, be an excellent sign of life."

"Nay, as I live, he openeth his eyes!" cried Anthony.

"And now he be a moving of his fingers!" added David with a like marvelling ; and then all watched with a famous interest the symptoms of returning consciousness in the wounded youth. The justice was somewhat puzzled what to do in so strange a case. Here was a murdered person coming to life, and no sign of Mabel was to be seen any where. He thought it was exceeding suspicious ; and then, believing he had given sufficient evidence of his valiant spirit, he sheathed his rapier, took his stick from one of the men who had picked it up on coming along, and leaning on it, kept considering how he should behave. In the meanwhile, William Shakspeare, with all the lanterns bearing upon his face, was looking upon those around him, greatly bewildered, yet beginning to have some confused ideas of where he was. Nevertheless, the faces, as far as he could distinguish, were unfamiliar to him. He felt weak, and ever and anon gave a strong shudder, as though his blood was chilled by so long lying in the dew and the night air.

"Methinks he hath on him something of an ague," observed Dame Lucy. "Could we get him home with us, now, some of my julep would do him famous good service, I warrant you."

"Humph!" cried Sir Thomas, gazing upon the stranger with a terrible penetrating look, upon hearing of this hint of the good dame, backed by assurances of its efficacy from each of the serving-men.

"An' it please you, sweet lady," said the youthful Shakspeare, faintly addressing Dame Lucy, emboldened to it by the evidence he had just heard of her considerateness for him, "I beseech you tell me, am I not still in the park of his good worship, Sir Thomas Lucy."

"That are you, beyond all question," replied she very courteously, for she was well pleased with the civilness with which the question had been put to her.

"Ay, you be just upon the very middle of Fairmead Grove, my young master," added one of the men.

"I thought I could not help being at the same place," observed the youth.

"But how didst come to that place, and what dost do at that place at so late an hour?" asked the justice, in a style that savoured wondrously of a disposition in him to doubt the honesty of the person he questioned. Thereupon William Shakspeare, without acquainting any with the reason of his visit to the park, told the knight how he had been a witness to the carrying off of Mabel by two villains, and how when striving to stop one, he was felled to the earth by the other.

"So!" exclaimed Sir Thomas, looking with more severity than ever, "Thou hast got a fine story; but I doubt t'will do thee any good at assize." Just as the knight had uttered this, the youth gave a sudden start upon noting for the first time his hands were covered with blood, which discovery, and the manner of his behaviour at that moment, was well observed by the justice. "Ha!" cried he, "How didst get thyself so dabbled?—Dost tell that cozening tale to me when thy hands and face bear evidence thou hast murdered our Mabel!"

"Murdered her!" exclaimed William, in extreme astonishment. "Believe me I would much rather have died in her rescue."

"*I* believe thee, fellow!" cried the justice, with extreme emphasis. "O' my life I do believe thee to be a most notorious horrible villain! But how didst get thyself in so suspicious a way? answer me that. The truth, fellow, the truth."

"As for what I see on my hand," observed the youth, "I am as much surprised at it as yourself can be; but on reflection, methinks 'tis easy to be accounted for."

"Is't indeed?" replied the knight. "Marry, I doubt it hugely."

"Doubtless the blow I received hath made a wound," continued the other. "And holding my aching head awhile, hath brought my hand to the state you see."

"Heart o' me! here be a wound indeed, Master," cried Sampson, closely examining the head of the suspected person by the aid of his lantern.

"By'r lady, and so there is!" added Dame Lucy. "I would he were where I could apply to it some of my famous julep; 'tis the sovereignest thing on earth for a green wound."

With the friendly assistance of the serving men, with whom there was not a doubt remaining of his perfect innocency, William Shakspeare stood upon his feet, and presently missed the book he had been studying before he fell asleep under the tree. The justice somewhat perplexed in his notions, stood regarding him with a most scrutinizing look.

"What dost want looking about so?" enquired he.

"A book, an' it please your worship," answered the other. "A book of sweet poems I was intent upon studying, before I beheld her you called Mabel being carried away, screaming in the arms of a villain!"

"I did kick my foot against something not a moment since," said Dame Lucy; "perchance that may be it." Hearing this the serving men and keepers looked carefully about with their lanterns.

"Thou saidst nought about her screaming just now," observed the justice sternly, upon whom this addition came with a very marvellous suspiciousness. "But tell us who thou art—thy name, fellow, thy name?"

"My name is William Shakspeare," answered the youth.

"What, John Shakspeare's son, of Stratford?" asked Sir Thomas quickly.

"The same, an' it please your worship."

"Then 'tis clear—'tis manifest—'tis most absolute and undeniable, fellow!" exclaimed the justice, with a severity greater than all he had yet shewn. "Mass, I thought I could not suspect thee without warrantable assurance. Thy name proves it. If thou hast not committed this foul murder, I will be sworn an ass all the rest of my days. Thou hast a most discreditable name, fellow. I know not a name of such ill repute that can be found any where. 'Tis a bad name; and being a bad name must needs be an ill name; and being an ill name cannot help being a name that a man shall chance to go to the hangman with."

"Here's the book, sure enough," cried one of the serving men.

"Book me no books," said the knight sharply, whose remembrance of what had been told him by Master Buzzard, made him careless of this new proof of the youth's innocence. "Take him away! I will look into this matter with more strictness. God's precious, so notorious, a name no man ever had! But let me examine this same book of which he hath spoken so confidently." Having got it in his hand, the justice had a lantern held to him and scrutinised it very narrowly.

"Ha! O' my life, I thought as much!" added he, looking from the book to the supposed murderer. "Thou hast stolen it. Here is in it the name of Sir Marmaduke de Largesse."

"He lent it me, as he hath done many others," replied William Shakspeare.

"*He* lend thee, fellow!" cried the knight disdainfully. "A person of his quality lend books to so horrible low a person as the son of John Shakspeare. How dost dare put so impudent an assertion on a justice o' the peace! Mass, 'tis manifest thou art a most thorough villain by thy name—'tis as clear thou hast stolen this book, and doubtless many others by thy professions—and there is no doubt thou hast done a foul murder by thy being in the neighbourhood at the time the wench was missing, and found here under such suspicious circumstances. Bring him along, Sampson! Thou art my close prisoner. I charge thee escape on thy peril."

Our young student, to his exceeding astonishment, found himself taken into custody; but to be accused of destroying that exquisite fair creature who had so long been the exclusive subject of his sweetest meditations, appeared to him so unnatural a thing, he could scarce believe it possible it could be thought of, for a single moment. Confused as he was by the effects of the blow, and still more bewildered by the behaviour of Sir Thomas Lucy, his apprehensions for the safety of the gentle Mabel, completely thrust aside every thing like fear for himself, and all the way to the house he did nothing but think of the possible dangers she might be exposed to in the hands of those desperate villains he had beheld carrying of her off. When he arrived at the mansion, he was led up stairs into a room where there was no possibility of escaping; and Dame Lucy presently came and washed his wound, applied to it some of her famous julep, and put on it a clean bandage; for although, as a wife, she would not for a moment doubt of the correctness of her husband's opinion, she could not allow such an opinion, bad as it was, to interfere with the wounded youth's receiving the advantage of her skill in remedies.

It was a small chamber, with a standing bed in it, whereon was a fair coverlet of the dame's needle work. A little table, with materials for washing, stood close at hand, which had evidently been in use; and beside them were sundry towels, pieces of cloth for bandage, bottles, scissors, and the like necessary sort of things for the dressing of a wound. The dame sat, with a famous serious aspect, in an arm chair, at the side of the table, fastening the bandage on the head of her patient, who knelt down at her feet. Close by the suspected murderer, holding a candle, stood a comely little damsel, whose bright eyes had gradually lost that fearfulness with which she at first regarded the wicked wretch she had been told he was.

Watching these, at a little distance, stood two simple looking fellows—the one with a long sheepish face, surrounded with straggling lanky locks, which was Hodge; and the other, with a head as round as an apple, of which the countenance was well marked out of all contradiction, for it would have rivalled any old buckler in the number of dents it had; and he was David. Each was leaning on a formidable looking harquebuss, and beside which they were armed with sword and dagger.

"Dost feel any more comfort now?" enquired the good dame, as her patient stood up before her, immediately the dressing of his wound was finished.

"Wonderful, I thank you very heartily," exclaimed the youth, leaning of himself against a chair—for he felt exceeding weak.

"I'm glad on't," added his physician, carefully pouring into a cup some of her famous julep; then giving the bottle to the black-eyed Kate, with an injunction to be mindful and put it down safely, she offered the cup and its contents to her patient. "Drink this, I prythee," said she, "and be assured 'twill do thee as much efficacy taken as an inward medicine, as thou hast already found when used as a lotion for a wound." William Shakspeare again thanked her with a like sincerity, and cheerfully swallowed the draught to the last drop. His behaviour had already pleased her, and the alacrity with which he drank what she had given him, delighted her still more. She rose from her seat, ordering the handmaid to clear the table, and get a bowl of milk and a manchet for the youth's supper: and then telling the two men Sir Thomas desired they left not the room on any account, nor once took their eyes off of their prisoner, she seemed as if about to take her departure. Yet still she lingered.

"I marvel thou dost not confess thy wickedness," said she, at last, to her young patient, manifestly more in sorrow than in anger. "Prythee, say what thou hast done with the body; for methinks the least thou canst do is to let her have Christian burial."

"Whose body, dear lady?" enquired he.

"Why, poor Mabel, whom thou hast so foully murdered" answered the dame. "Alack! 'tis a grievous thing one so young—and so well behaved too—should do so horrible a thing." Kate stood still a moment, and regarded the suspected murderer with a wonderful searching glance.

"I beseech you, think of me not so vilely!" exclaimed the youthful Shakspeare, with great earnestness. "By all things most sacred, I do assure you, I got this blow in endeavouring to stay the villains who carried her off." Kate returned to her work with a look of infinite satisfaction.

"Didst not hear what Sir Thomas said?" enquired the old lady, very gravely; "and dost really imagine that one of thy years can know better of a thing than a justice o' the peace, and a knight o' the shire, who owneth lands in five counties!" Thereupon the good dame shook her head with a wonderful solemnity, and walked, in her stateliest manner, out of the chamber.

"Prythee, Kate, bring us a jug of small ale!" exclaimed the man with the indented face, as he threw himself into a chair, directly his mistress had closed the door. "I'm horrible thirsty after all this fruitless searching for poor Mabel."

"Body o' me, so am I, David!" said he with the sheepish countenance, following the other's example. "I feel as though I had lived on pickled herrings for a whole month of fast days, I be so uncommon dry. Come, Kate, bring us a tankard."

"Wait till thy betters be served, Hodge," replied the girl quickly. David looked hard at Hodge, and Hodge looked hard at David; and then both looked very hard at their prisoner.

"I pray you, good sir, to seat yourself," said Kate to the latter, who still stood leaning against the back of a chair, looking faint and pale; and thereupon she moved the chair round for him, convenient for his sitting. "Methinks you must want rest exceedingly."

"I thank you," replied he, taking her proffered kindness very courteously; "I am indeed somewhat weary."

"O' my life I am monstrous sorry," observed she, regarding him with an evident symphathy; "but I will make what speed I can with your supper, so that you shall to bed quickly and get you a good sleep, for which I doubt not you shall be much the better."

"I have no stomach for anything, I thank you all the same," said the patient faintly.

"Nay, but you go not to bed supperless, I promise you," exclaimed Kate, with one of her pleasantest smiles; "such light victual must needs be what would do you most good; and I will take care it shall be greatly to your liking." As soon as she had left the room, Hodge again looked at David and David looked at Hodge, and both looked at their prisoner harder than before. After which the former laid his piece carefully on his lap, and the other did the same immediately; then he of the well-marked countenance stooped forward, poking out his chin and his lips towards his companion, making a sort of half-stifled whistling, and the owner of the sheep-face lost no time in following his example.

"I beseech you tell me," said William Shakspeare, "if there exists any evidence other than what I have stated for supposing the gentle Mabel hath come to any hurt?" At hearing of this question the two men looked at each other a little harder, and whistled a little louder than they had previously done.

"I would gladly hear any intelligence of her safety," added he, upon finding he got no answer; but these words merely produced an accompaniment to the whistling in the shape of the drumming of three fingers of each of his guard upon the table before them. Observing they did not choose to speak, he desisted of his questions till the entrance of the pretty handmaid with his supper, of whom he enquired in a like manner, telling her also he could get no answer of any kind from the persons she had left with him.

"Why so churlish, I prythee?" exclaimed Kate, as she placed close to the wounded youth a bowl of hot milk spiced with nutmeg and cinnamon, and a fair white loaf, knife and spoon, on a tray covered with a cloth that seemed to rival the milk in whiteness. "Methinks 'twill do you no great harm to open your mouths a bit, the which you are ready enough to do over a full trencher."

"The justice hath commanded that we have no communications with the prisoner," observed David with extreme seriousness.

"And moreover hath desired that we speak to him at our peril," added Hodge.

"A fig's end for the justice!" cried their pretty companion, to the infinite astonishment of the serving men; "art so weak of conceit as to suspect this good youth of so improbable a thing as the killing of our Mabel? Why thou hast no more brains than a blighted apple." Then turning to the supposed murderer with an increased kindness of manner, assured him that nothing was known concerning of the missing person but what he had himself told, and pressed him urgently to partake of what she had brought, so that he could not refuse; and when she had again taken herself out of the room, David and Hodge looked at each other, and then at their prisoner, so terrible hard their eyes must have ached for some minutes after. William Shakspeare took no notice of them, although they were watching of him narrowly. All at once the two men snatched up their harquebusses as if they would have them in readiness for immediate use, and put all the valour they possessed into their looks. They had observed he had taken a knife into his hand, as they thought with no other purpose than to stab them and then make his escape; but he merely used it for the cutting of a slice off the loaf to sop in his milk. This did not assure them. They kept their gaze on his every motion with extreme seriousness, save when he happened by chance to raise his eyes from the supper he was languidly tasting, when on a sudden they would be diligently examining one or other of their legs they were swinging to and fro on the chair, with as complete a carelessness as if they were thinking of nothing.

Presently Kate returned again, bearing a brimming tankard, which she put down between the two serving men.

"I doubt hugely thou dost deserve anything of the sort," said she to them; "thou showest such uncivil behaviour towards this good youth. I would wager my life on't he knoweth no more of murder than a child unborn."

"But his worship declareth he *doth* know of it, Kate," observed David with more than ordinary solemness.

"And moreover hath determined 'twas done by this person and no other," added Hodge after the like fashion.

"I care not for fifty worships," replied she, flashing her dark eyes very prettily; "or for what they say, or for what they do, when they shew such marvellous injustice. Is't reasonable—is't natural—is't credible, one of his years, with a countenance too as innocent as is a lambkin—should take to such villanous courses? Why, what shallow-witted poor creatures must they be who would entertain such intolerable notions."

The rough-featured serving man, as she turned her back to approach the prisoner, shook his head with a very wonderful solemnity; and then, not knowing what better to be at, put his mouth to the tankard, and whilst he drank kept his watchful eyes squinting over the rim in the direction of the supposed murderer. After a time had elapsed, which his companion thought was considerable longer than it ought to have been, he handed his sheep-faced companion the tankard, wiping of his mouth with the cuff of his jerkin at the same moment, and looking such volumes of hidden meaning as it is utterly impossible to express, to which the other responded by giving a hasty glance at the roof, and then a prodigious long one into the tankard, to which his jaws appeared to be fixed with such firmness there was no getting of them apart.

"Now a fair good night to you;" exclaimed the smiling little creature finding, with all her kind persuading, she could not get him to eat more of his supper. "You can to bed as soon as you have a mind; and I hope you will enjoy an excellent sweet rest. Good night," repeated she, and gave with it so soft a glance as if she intended to have subdued all the manhood in his nature.

"Good night!" replied William Shakspeare earnestly; "and a million of thanks for your great kindness."

Directly Kate had departed, David threw himself back in the chair in the fullest conviction, from what he had observed, that she entertained a design for the prisoner's escape; and doubtless the same conclusions were come at by Hodge, for he put on his countenance much the same sort of expression, and, seeing the supposed murderer rising from his seat, both his guards grasped their arms firmly on the instant, and started to their feet, manifestly suspecting he was about to rush upon them. This movement of his, however, was merely made for the purpose of throwing himself on the bed, which he soon did with his clothes on, for with a delicacy suitable to his years, he liked not undressing of himself before strangers. In truth, he was thoroughly exhausted by pain, anxiety, and weariness, and in a few minutes was in as deep a sleep as ever he had enjoyed in his whole life.

The two serving men had returned to their seats. Both gazed upon the young student, and then at each other, as if they had huge doubts he had any intention of sleeping. In a short time all was as silent you might have heard a pin drop, which silence seemed exceeding irksome to the guard. Each looked to see his weapons were in good order—each snuffed the candle—and each buried his nose in the tankard; but the prisoner remained motionless, and the silence grew all the greater. It was evident, from a number of fidgetty ways they were continually exhibiting, that they could not long remain without some talking.

"Methinks Sampson's niece groweth horribly bold, Hodge;" observed David at last in a low voice.

"Ay, that does she," answered Hodge in a whisper. "I never heard of such extreme impudency in any wench."

"Heart o' me!" said the other; "I did myself hear her cry out, 'a fig for the justice!' which seemeth to me to smack abominably of a wilful rebelling against those in authority."

"Ay, David," added his companion; "and as I remember, she had the infamousness to assert she cared not for fifty worships."

"My hair stood on end at hearing it," said David. "But I doubt not 'twill bring down on her some awful judgment."

"It cannot help doing so," replied Hodge.

"Nevertheless, we must not say aught against her of what we have heard," observed he of the marks. "For she hath some lusty fellows of her acquaintance, who, perchance, might not take it civil of us."

"Ah, that she hath!" quoth the sheepish looking one, with a famous seriousness. "One of whom broke my head at the last May games, because I laughed when she slipped down, and shewed somewhat more of her ankle than is customary."

"At least, we will take good heed she shall not assist the prisoner to escape," observed David.

"I warrant you," said Hodge. Again there was so dead a silence it seemed to make their flesh creep; and they looked on the sleeping youth in such a manner as proved they would have liked any other company. They turned over in their minds the possibility of his suddenly rising and making some desperate effort at their destruction, with the expectation of saving his own life by it; and the more they thought of it, the more convinced were they it would be done ere they could be aware. This state of apprehension at last became insupportable, and both made a movement at the same moment to turn their attention to another matter. David raised the tankard to his mouth to drown his fears in a full draught; and Hodge snatched up the snuffers desperately intent on lessening the wick of the candle, which he had been screwing up his courage to do for the last half hour. Alack, the trepidation he was in caused him to snuff it out; and then they were in total darkness. To be in company with an unfettered murderer was bad enough of all conscience, but to be left in the dark with him was more than mortal courage would allow of. David trembled so he could not hold the tankard, so down it went, and the noise it made so frightened him and his associate, that they dropped their harquebusses, and making for the door, rushed down stairs at the top of their speed, crying out, "murder!" as loud as they could bawl.

About five minutes afterwards a most formidable armament, composed of every male in the house armed to the teeth, some half dressed, and here and there a nightcap to shew they had been disturbed from their sleep, crept cautiously up the stairs. They gained the landing —the justice having placed himself in the centre of his household, in a nightgown and slippers, a velvet cap on his head, a drawn sword in one hand, and a pistol in the other. Before him were Sampson the gamekeeper and two of his sons—all stout fellows, in forester's frocks, carrying loaded pieces,—then came Anthony, David, and Hodge with drawn rapiers—the knight next, and after him the grooms and scullions with lights in one hand and some goodly weapon in the other. Besides which, from open doors were seen divers of the women in their night dress, taking a peep at what was going on, with a scarce repressible inclination for a good scream. When the men got near the door, upon David and Hodge reminding them that the murderer had with him two loaded harquebusses, no one seemed inclined to go in before his fellows.

"How know you not he may be this very moment behind the door," said David in a terrible frightened way, that carried conviction to most of his hearers. "Nay, I do believe I hear him now levelling of his piece!" This occasioned a sudden backing of the armed party, and a famous scream from the women. The knight said nothing— —for an indisputable reason—he had nothing to say—but he felt that had he known the murderer had been so terrible a fellow, he would have been hanged ere he would have meddled with him. The dispute among the leaders still raged high. Every one seemed desirous of giving his neighbour the honour of going first; but not one of all that body but modestly declined having to do with any such greatness. At last the argument was put a stop to by the sudden appearance of Kate with a lighted candle in her hand.

"What dost want, Kate?"

"What dost want, Uncle?" was said at the same moment by the stout Sampson and his pretty niece.

"The murderer is seeking to escape us;" replied Anthony.

"Prythee, get thee hence, or thou wilt be shot," exclaimed one of her cousins.

"I marvel there should be such foolishness!" observed Kate; and the next moment, to the infinite horror and astonishment of the whole party, walked deliberately into the formidable chamber.

"I prythee come here, uncle Sampson, if thou has not lost thy wits as completely as the rest," added she from the interior. "Thou shalt see a sight as little akin to violence as can be seen any where." Sampson creeped cautiously—his sons followed their father with the like heed—the serving men trod in the steps of the gamekeepers, Sir Thomas Lucy and the rest of his dependants, half curiousness and fear, pushed forward in the like direction, and the women with what they had hastily put on, came to take a peep where they could. To the great marvelling of all, there lay the supposed murderer as fast asleep as ever he could be; and there lay the broken tankard; and there lay the fallen harquebusses. Now who was so valorous as the justice; he seemed as though he would have cut his cowardly serving-men into ribbons for having woke up the whole household with so fabulous a tale as they had told of the sudden and outrageous attack upon them of their prisoner; however, he contented himself with ordering them to stay where they were and keep better watch; and then he, with the rest, presently retraced their steps to their several beds.

In the morning William Shakspeare woke up, marvellously refreshed by his night's rest, and the first objects that met his sight were his guards sound asleep, snoring loud enough to wake anybody. Inconceivable was the consternation of David and Hodge, upon opening their eyes, to find so dreadful a person close upon them, but taking of them no more heed than if they had been a couple of drowned puppies left in a dry pond. Each cautiously sought to gain possession of his fire-arms, which stood at a little distance from them upon neighbouring chairs, and to their great joy this they succeeded in doing. Our young student, in his turn, was in a considerable astonishment, when, upon turning round, with his face dripping with water, to get to the towel, he encountered the fixed fearful gaze of his guards, whom a moment since he had beheld in so perfect a state of somnolency. He could not avoid standing looking at them for a few moments, there was so strange an expression in their countenances; and they gazed as though he had such power in his eyes they could not turn their own aside. However, directly he went to the towel, and was rubbing himself with it, the two stared at each other more intently than they had ever done.

He had just got himself in his cleanest trim, and feeling wonderfully comfortable, when his pretty little friend, the gamekeeper's niece, made her appearance with his breakfast, in a kinder mood than ever; and he was sufficiently improved to do justice to her cater-ing, even had it not been garnished with such winning entreaties and smiling looks as accompanied it. He had scarce made a finish of his meal, when Dame Lucy entered, bottle in hand, and finding him so much better, she again washed his wound with her infallible julep, and then made him swallow a cup of the same, with a very visible satisfaction, especially when he gratefully ascribed his better health to her wonderful medicine. The old dame could not forbear sighing at the thought of losing so goodly a patient, and in her own mind thought it monstrous pitiful one so tractable in the taking of medicine, should be turned over to so disreputable a physician as the hangman.

About an hour after this, closely escorted by his guards, the prisoner entered the justice's room. Sir Thomas sat in a high-backed cushioned chair, with a screen at his back to keep off the wind, and a table before him to hold such papers, books, and utensils of writing as he needed. Jemmy Catchpole sat at the end of the table mending of a pen, for he was sure to be sent for on all knotty cases, to advise with the justice, and see that the law was properly administered. There were several persons—farmers and yeomen they looked to be—sitting on a long settle at the father end of the chamber, perchance on some business with his worship, gnawing their sticks, fiddling their hats, and staring about them, as men do who are kept waiting in a strange place, when they would rather be elsewhere. Sampson, the stout gamekeeper, and his two stout sons, with Anthony, a bull-headed, pig's-eyed serving-man, having remarkable thin legs, very much after the fashion of a pair of nut-crackers, and two or three stupid blubberly fellows of clowns, carrying staves in token of their being constables, stood in a half circle at a yard or so from the table. The justice leaned back in his chair, looking awfully solemn at Jemmy Catchpole, the lawyer leaned forward on his stool, gazing with equal solemnity at his worship; and the constables, gamekeepers, and serving men stared from the ground to the ceiling and from the ceiling to the ground, with a solemness more awful than either. This was the moment of the prisoner's appearance.

"Call William Shakspeare!" exclaimed Sir Thomas, as soon as he noticed that there was no occasion to do anything of the sort.

"Call William Shakspeare," repeated the lawyer to one of the constables.

"Will'm Shuk—spur!" hoarsely bawled out a short, thick, bandy-legged man, with a face that would have outblushed a poppy. The youth was just before him, and answered readily to his name.

"William Shakspeare!" said the justice, in his gravest voice; "you are brought before me, her Majesty's justice o' the peace, on a charge—that is to say, you are here before me accused of—yes, accused of and charged with—charged with divers horrible offences—that is to say, criminally charged with, or I might say, accused of, all manner of misdemeanours, and with perpetrating and committing divers horrible offences against the peace of our sovereign lady Queen Elizabeth; whereof the first against you is no less a crime than to be accused of, or otherwise charged with, the horrible offence of stealing—against the peace of our sovereign lady Queen Elizabeth, as aforesaid."

Having made so imposing a display of his judicial oratory, his worship cried out—"Call Anthony Gosling!" Jemmy Catchpole repeated the command to the hoarse man with the bandy legs.

"Ant'ny Gos—lin!" bawled the constable.

"Here!" replied a voice from the bull-headed serving-man, and the thin legs made two steps out of the half circle towards the table.

"Swear him!" exclaimed the justice, and the lawyer, laying hold of a little book, mumbled a few sentences in a quick low tone, at the conclusion of which Antony made a bob with his head towards the book, and then held up his head again very stiff, and looked very desperate. Just as this was done, an interruption appeared in the person of the pretty gamekeeper's niece, who presented a letter to the justice, the sight of which set him making of another famous speech, accusing the prisoner of stealing sundry books belonging to Sir Marmaduke de Largesse; and then putting forth the letter as one just received from Sir Marmaduke in answer to a communication sent that morning by himself, concerning of the charges against William Shakspeare, he bade Jemmy Catchpole read it, as it doubtless contained decisive evidence of the prisoner's guilt. Jemmy Catchpole read it very carefully, and the farther he read the more astonished was the justice, for it not only contained a clear acknowledgment that the book had been lent by the writer to the prisoner, but spoke in the highest terms of eulogy of this identical William Shakspeare as a youth of admirable character, whom he had long known and respected, and begging Sir Thomas Lucy, as a particular favour, to treat that person honourably, to let him retain the book which he had falsely been accused of stealing, and allow him to return to his house immediately, on a horse he had sent by one of his serving-men.

Sir Thomas would not believe his ears, and could scarce believe his eyes, even when he had himself closely examined the hand-writing and the seal; but he could not so easily be brought to part with his prisoner. There was the charge of murder yet to be entered into; and he was proceeding in his usual rambling manner to state the accusation, when one of the yeomen on the settle started up on a sudden, and stated he had seen, when returning from work the night before, the said Mabel carried in the arms of a strange gallant, accompanied by a companion, and both were riding at so great a pace, they were quickly lost sight of. No sooner did his worship hear this statement, than sharply ordering Jemmy Catchpole to return the book to the prisoner and dismiss him, he stalked indignantly out of the chamber, and could not be brought to do any more justice business all that day.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ah, my swete swetyng!
My lytyl prety swetyng,
My swetyng wyl I love wherever I go;
She is so proper and pure,
Full stedfast, stabill and demure,
There is none such ye may be sure,
As my swete swetyng.

OLD SONG.

Fly away!
Let my command force thee to that, which shame
Would do without it. If thou understoodst
The loathed office thou hast undergone,
Why, thou wouldst hide thee under heaps of hills,
Lest men should dig and find thee.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

Is this the place where virtue is to suffer?

MASSINGER.

MABEL awoke in a feverish uneasy state the morning after her ab-
iction, and found herself in a strange bed, having to it hangings of
e costliest description. By degrees, the adventures of the preced-
g night came upon her memory. She could distinctly remember
e treacherous gallant of her former acquaintance, and the forbid-
ng features of his servile companion; and then she had some faint
emembrance of a courteous lady, who had assured her of her safety,
d after a wondrous shew of kindness and protection, had made her
ke such refreshment as she needed, and then conducted her, as she
id, to her own chamber, that she might sleep with a full sense of
curity. Some time passed whilst the poor foundling endeavoured
collect her scattered thoughts, to find out the reason she had been
rcibly taken from her home.

After wandering from one topic to another with no other result
an to get more bewildered than she was at first, she resolved to
ress herself forthwith, believing it to be far beyond her usual hour
r so doing; but when she sought her clothes, not a vestige was to
seen in any part of the chamber. This seemed stranger than all.
he remembered the kind lady helping her to undress with manifold
surances of her perfect safety; and she recollected also placing of
er things upon a chair that stood within a few paces of the bed; but
ere was the chair with its tapestry cushion uncovered by so much
a single thread. As she was marvelling at so unaccountable a
isappearance, the door of her chamber opened, and there entered a
dy of considerable attractions, both in form and figure, yet a close
bserver might have detected, despite the artful bloom on her cheek,
at she had passed her youth. Her head was dressed in the latest
enetian tire; an open collar of the newest fashion disclosed the

whiteness of her neck, and a dress of orange tawney silk, fairly trimmed with the whitest lace, set off the proportions of her figure to the completest advantage. She was followed by a female, who seemed by her dress to be a servant, carrying on her arm what appeared to be sundry articles of wearing apparel.

Doubtless the first of these two was the kind lady of whom Mabel had been thinking, for she came smiling to the bedside, kissed the fair foundling with an amazing affectionateness, asked a thousand questions in a breath how she had fared, how she had slept, whether she would rise, and what she would choose to break her fast with; and then, scarce allowing the other opportunity to give a single answer, she informed her she had brought her servant to tire her in such apparelling as she had considered fittest for her wear, as the things her young friend wore were of far too mean a sort for a person she loved so dearly. Mabel was not suffered to make any objection. The rich beauty of her new attire was temptingly displayed before her admiring eyes, and jewels of the fairest water lay dazzlingly besides it. She thought them a rare sight indeed; but 'twas all in vain she declared them to be much too fine for her wearing, the kind lady would hear nothing of the sort, stopped her mouth with all sorts of endearing expressions, and fairly pulled her from the bed, entreating she would allow her sweet lovely person to be attired without a word more.

As she was being dressed, she could not help observing the exquisite work in the arras that surrounded the chamber, upon which was depicted, in the most glowing colours, the loves of Venus and Adonis. Nothing could be so beautiful, she thought, save the carved corners of the bedstead, each of which represented a naked Cupid, figured to the life, grasping the stem of a palm-tree with one arm, and holding back the silken curtains with the other, and looking under them with an expression that seemed to say there was in the bed something beyond conception admirable. At each corner of the chamber were fair statues of marble, the very loveliest and lovingest objects that had ever been produced by the sculptor's art, and there was scarce any one thing about her that did not bear on it such forms of beauty as are most enticing to the young and imaginative mind. Certes, for all such cunning was displayed in these figures, whereon whatever art could do in fashioning what was most graceful had been essayed, a piece of nature's more perfect handiwork there present outstripped them all.

"O' my life, sweetest creature! how exceeding beautiful thou art!" exclaimed the lady, gazing on Mabel, as if in an absolute wonder.

"Dost think so, indeed!" replied the half-dressed beauty, blushing somewhat, to the great heightening of her most moving graces.

"Think so? O, thou dear rogue!" said the lady, in an arch way; "wouldst have me believe thou knowest nothing of the matter? Hast never looked on those unrivalled features? Hast never beheld those exquisite limbs? Fie! fie! Thou canst not help knowing it better than any, and thinking of it too."

"Believe me, I have thought of it but little," answered the pretty foundling.

"Nay, I will believe nothing of the sort," responded the other: "there was never a woman yet that knew not her own attractiveness, and it is said some do occasionally see and think more of it than other folks; but that there should exist in this world a creature of the most ravishing loveliness ever beheld, who knoweth, and thinketh but little of her own rare perfections, is clean out of all credibility."

"I assure you, it is as I have said," observed Mabel.

"Heaven forgive thee!" exclaimed the lady, shaking her head, and laughing very prettily; "never met I so undeniable a story-teller, and yet coming from so fair a source, no truth could appear half so winningly. Prythee, take my word then, since thou hast such lack of proper acquaintance with the subject; and be assured, one more seemly featured, and gracefully limbed withal, is not to be met with, search the whole kingdom through." Then, turning to the tirewoman, whose large dark eyes and full round face expressed somewhat of wantonness, she added, "What dost think of it, Abigail?"

"An' it please you, my Lady Comfit, methinks there needs no questioning," replied the tirewoman, then on the floor, fitting on an embroidered shoe, seemingly of the smallest size, as Mabel sat on a chair with the Lady leaning over her. "Touching the face, if ever any man gazed on features so moving, beauty hath gone out of my knowledge; and as for the person—who hath ever looked on so neat a foot, so delicate an ankle—or so exquisite a leg as there are here?" Mabel, blushing deeper than ever, because of there being at that moment a greater display of her symmetry of limb than she thought becoming, drew away her foot hastily, and rose from her seat.

"Oh, the pretty rogue, how rosily she blushes!" exclaimed Lady Comfit, laughingly, drawing the abashed maiden towards a large mirror. "Now, if thou wilt not believe other evidence, deny thyself if thou canst." And thereupon her companion pointed to the reflection. Mabel saw before her a form and figure such as hath been described, arrayed with all the choiceness which skill in dress could give to them, for she wore a velvet suit of a plum colour, worn low, and delicately powdered with gold and pearl, her fair neck embraced with a necklace of blushing rubies, and jewels of greater rarity in her hair, ears, and stomacher. The poor foundling could hardly believe she was the admirable creature she saw in all that bravery, and Lady Comfit and Abigail looked at each other, as if they mightily enjoyed her astonishment.

"Methinks, I have never appeared so comely in all my life before," observed the simple girl.

"Thou art right, I doubt not," replied the lady, with a smile; "but thou shalt no longer hide so bright a light. Come along, I prythee, my sweet creature. Such rare attractions should be rarely appreciated, or huge wrong would be done thee. Thou shalt have choice worshipping. This way, dear sweet rogue, and I will tell thee more anon." So saying, with her arm round the waist of the gentle Mabel, Lady Comfit entered an adjoining chamber.

If the humble foundling had been dazzled by the costly furnishing of the bedchamber, how much more reason had she to be similarly influenced, when she beheld the greater splendour of the chamber she had just entered. The arras was more gorgeous, and on it was depicted, in the very richest colouring, the loves of Jupiter and others of the heathen deities. In one place was Danaë, yielding her enamoured nature to the golden shower—a type of that species of affectionateness still met with in woman, that can be easily procured by the like means. There, Leda caressing of the stately swan, whose graceful movements and fair apparelling had so won upon her admiration—symbolical of that sort of loving amongst the sex, which hath no better origin than mere outward appearances: and elsewhere, Europa, borne over the yielding waves by the bull, whose lustiness of limb had provoked her to such hardihood as lost her to her company—a right true picture of that sort of feeling in women occasionally met with, miscalled love, which doth so conspicuously savour of the mere animal. Besides these, were subjects out of all number of a like description, so movingly delineated, that it was scarce possible for any that gazed on them, not to find their dispositions softened into a similar tendency.

But every object in both chambers seemed studiously fashioned so as to breathe of love—not that love which is the pure offspring of the affections, and can only live in the rare atmosphere of intellectual beauty; but that more gorgeous blossom—often mistaken for the modest flower of the same name,—that springs from rank rich soils, and thrives best in the stifling air of luxurious indulgence. Both apparently are warmed by the same sun, so are the rose and the poppy—and oft appear of the same glowing complexion, as shall be found in the flower and the weed just named; but the one hath in it so sweet an essence, that ever so small a particle delighteth the senses by its exquisiteness, and can do harm to none—whilst the other secretes deadly intoxicating juices, which give an unnatural stimulus to those who take it for their enjoyment, fevers the blood, poisons the nature, and kills the soul.

Lady Comfit allowed the simple girl to admire as much as she would, without interruption, the costly and subduing beauty of the several ornaments of the chamber, and then led her to a table prodigally garnished with all manner of spicy viands and stimulating wines. Meats and pasties divided the space with glass bottles filled with the products of the choicest vineyards, rich silver cups and platters, china dishes, and embroidered napery. Mabel, who had all her life eat her simple meal of cold meat and bread, off a wooden trencher, accompanied with a draught of small ale from a horn cup, looked in some amazement at such store of tempting delicacies, displayed in vessels of such extreme value as here presented themselves for her accommodation. Lady Comfit pressed her to name her choice, and she seemed so sore puzzled that the lady kindly recommended such dishes as she herself most approved of, portions of which the poor foundling thankfully accepted, and found of a marvellous delectable flavour.

"And now what wine dost prefer, sweetest?" inquired the lady lovingly.

"An' it please you, I would rather a cup of small ale," replied Mabel, at which the lady and her tirewoman laughed very pleasantly.

"Small ale, dear heart!" exclaimed Lady Comfit. "Such drink is never for ladies—'tis fit only for serving men and such low persons."

"Then perchance, a draught of spring water might be had readily?" asked her companion, at which the other two laughed more pleasantly than before.

"Water!" cried the lady at last. "I'faith I should be much to blame were I to let thee swallow such unwholesome stuff. Here is wine for thee, and plenty—the choicest withal that ever came of the grape."

"But I am monstrous thirsty," observed Mabel, "and wine is of too great a strength for one so unused to it as am I, to quench their thirst with."

"Tush, my sweet creature," replied Lady Comfit; "this wine is not so strong as small ale, be assured of it. Is it, Abigail?" asked she of her attendant.

"'Tis made expressly for ladies' drinking, an' it please you, my lady," answered Abigail, very readily. "A child might drink a bottle of it with as much innocence as though it was mere water."

"Without doubt," added her mistress, taking one of the bottles and pouring part of its rich contents into a silver goblet. "I will myself shew thee how harmless a beverage it is." So saying, she raised the brimming vessel to her lips and swallowed it at a draught. Assured by this, that there could be no harm in it, the unsuspicious Mabel allowed herself to take a moderate draught, seeing which her companions looked at each other with a peculiar smile, and presently, as she found the spicy nature of what she had eat so plentifully, made her mouth hot and dry, after the same pressing entreaties and earnest assurances, she repeated it. At last, finding the simple girl could not be persuaded to eat or drink a mouthful more, the attendant cleared away the things, and Mabel was left alone with the lady.

Directly they were left alone, the latter drew her chair close to that of her young companion, and with an irresistible air of sincerity and friendliness, took one of the poor foundling's hands in her own.

"What a happy woman thou art!" exclaimed Lady Comfit, with wonderful emphasis, and observing Mabel looked as though she could not comprehend what should make her so very happy, added with increasing earnestness, "What a proud woman thou art!" This exclamation appeared to be less understood than the preceding. "At least thou *shouldst* be," added the lady, in a marked manner. "I doubt not there are thousands of women would give all they are worth in the world to have thy good fortune."

"Indeed!" cried Mabel, in a famous astonishment.

"Ay, that would they, my sweet creature," cried her companion, pressing her hand very affectionately. "But who of them all hath thy desert? Art thou not formed to be loved as no woman was ever loved before?" At hearing this the poor foundling appeared to marvel too greatly to say anything.

"O' my word, thou art like to become the envy of all women," continued Lady Comfit. "Methinks, 'twould be a most pitiful shame to allow of such perfections as thou hast, to be shut up in an obscure place where they can be seen of none who would hold them in proper appreciation, whilst the powerfulest noble in the land is sighing of his heart away with a sweet hoping so fair a creature might be esteemed of him, cherished by him, and caressed by him in such fashion as she is most worthy of. But I will wager my life on't thou hast too noble a spirit to be of such poor commodity; and art of too kindly a disposedness to let a princely gentleman, anxious to gratify thy every wish, linger out his days in hopeless misery, for lack of that happiness thou alone art capable of bestowing."

"I?" exclaimed Mabel, incredulously. "Believe me, I know of no such person—have seen no such person. Surely there is some huge mistake in this."

"Never did truer thing occur," replied the lady. "It matters not that thou shouldst never have beheld him—be assured he hath seen thee, and, as it could not help being, at the first sight of so much ravishing beauty, his noble heart was taken close prisoner, and he hath ever since been in a passionate phrenzy of impatience for the gaining of thy dear love."

"Methinks, 'tis a strange way of shewing such, to tear me from my friends," observed the poor foundling.

"'Tis the way of these great ones, sweetest," answered her companion. "But 'tis done out of no disrespect, be assured; for he hath ordered thou shalt be treated with as much honour as though thou wert a crowned queen."

"'Tis exceeding strange!" said Mabel, marvelling the more, the more she heard.

"Thou wilt see him anon," added the other. "And doubt not he will love thee with so deep a fondness, he will leave thee no cause for one moment's disquietude. Thou wilt be made happy straight—and such happiness shalt thou enjoy as thou hast never had experience of. All that divinest love and boundless magnificence can effect, shall crown thy wishes—never ending pleasures shall entice thy inclinations the whole day long—the splendid pageantries of state—the homage bestowed on absolute power—the observances and ceremonials of highest rank shall be for thy particular honour on all occasions; and wherever thou art inclined to turn thy steps, thou shalt meet with some new delight of infinite exquisiteness, provided for no other end than to assist in making perpetual thy inconceivable felicity."

"Indeed, I know not what to say on such a matter," observed her young companion, somewhat bewildered at so magnificent a perspective. "I am so very humble a person, I cannot think myself fit to be raised to so proud a station; and in all sincerity I say it, I would rather back to my friends, to give place to some one more worthy."

"I will never allow of thy doing so foolish a thing," exclaimed Lady Comfit, in some seeming astonishment. "Thou must needs be the worst possible judge of the matter that exists; and I am thy friend, sweetest, and therefore the very properest to advise thee in such a case." And thereupon the lady squeezed the foundling's hand, and gazed on her more affectionately than ever.

"I should feel extremely bounden to you, would you counsel me what to do," said the simple girl. "In very truth, my humbleness seemeth to me utterly inconsistent with such grandeur as you have spoken of."

"Nay, 'tis thy modesty maketh thee think so," replied the other. "None can be so fit as thou art. Didst not note how famously thou didst become these costly vestments? Just so admirably wilt thou become the love of that princely gentleman who commanded them for thy wearing. Trouble thyself nothing concerning of thine own thoughts. Thou art too young, sweetheart, to see these things in the properest light. Let it suffice, that the proud noble who loveth thee with such infiniteness, in his heart alloweth of none being so exalted; and to convince thee how great is his respect, hath required me, Lady Arabella Comfit, an earl's daughter, to be thy companion and friend, and shew thee such prodigal kindness as I would shew to no other living."

The poor foundling could scarce express her estimation of being treated with such handsomeness as to have an earl's daughter for her companion, and the latter having at last managed to allay her doubts and excite her curiousness, bade her amuse herself as she chose for a short time; and then caressing her with extreme affectionateness, left the chamber. Mabel felt in a strange state of excitement. Not a thought of evil entered her pure mind, for she was of that extreme unsuspiciousness which exists only in perfect innocency and genuine truthfulness—a nature which, like a clear mirror in the fair sunshine, is made to throw o'er what it looks on, the light shining upon itself.

In the meanwhile the Lady Arabella proceeded to a distant chamber, with an expression on her countenance very unlike what she had put on before the gentle Mabel, and as soon as she had opened the door, she gave way to a most unequivocal satirical sort of laugh. There was no one present but a gallant of a middle age dressed in the foppery of the times, who had the look of confirmed dissoluteness which a long course of prodigal living usually bestows, and he was idling the time away by picking of his teeth, with the remnants of his recent meal before him. The room was nothing like so choicely furnished as those the lady had left, yet it had sufficient comfort in it to content any ordinary person.

"Ha! how flieth the game, Moll?" exclaimed the gallant, on noticing the entrance of his visitor. "Doth she take the lure bravely?

Cometh she fairly into the decoy? But I see by thy laughing she hath been so prettily mewed, that she careth not to ruffle her feathers against the golden wires of her cage."

"O' my life, thou hast hit it," replied the lady, as she threw herself into a chair. "The pretty fool is in such conceit of her splendid prison, she seemeth well content to stay in it all her days."

"She hath more wit than I have seen in her, if she can get it to last beyond a month or so," observed her companion; "then she may fly where she lists. But hast taken care to fill her sufficiently with my lord?" inquired he.

"To the very throat," answered the other. "Indeed, I have so crammed her with him, that it must needs take some hours ere she can require another meal."

"Nay, keep up her stomach, I prythee, Moll," cried the gallant, laughingly. "When my lord comes, she may carve for herself. I shall start off on the instant, to acquaint him with the joyful intelligence, and ride like a post all the way; and I hope he will bountifully remember my monstrous pains to provide him with so dainty a leman; for in sober truth, my long ill luck at the cards, a murrain on them! hath left me as near bare of coin as a pig's tail is of feathers."

So saying, with a laugh half stifled with a yawn, he rose from his seat, stretching his arms out to the near bursting of his doublet.

"As I live, I do look for some famous reward myself, or I would not be so intent upon the matter," observed the lady; "and yet I marvel he should get so desperately enamoured of a raw chit, that hath scarce sense enough to know she walks upon two legs."

"Methinks, he had better have taken to thee, Moll, eh?" inquired he, somewhat in a sarcastic manner. "Mass! there is exceeding little of the raw chit about thee, I'll warrant; and as for knowing, I would wager a dozen marks thou couldst spare a goodly share of thy knowledge, and yet be all the better for't."

"For which I have to thank thee, thou thrice accursed villain!" fiercely exclaimed his companion, starting into a sudden rage at the taunt. "I was well enough ere I listened to thy beguiling."

"Doubtless," coolly replied the other; "well enough for one that is no better. And as for beguiling, thou took it so readily, it was clear 'twas an exceeding familiar acquaintance with thee."

"Thou liest, thou paltry cozening knave!" cried the lady, looking monstrous black at him. "There could not be one more virtuous in this world, ere I had such ill hap as to meet with thee."

"Marry, but I have huge doubts of that, Moll," said the gallant, quietly putting on his hat; "virtuousness such as thine must needs have been wonderfully cheap to the haver, for, as I well remember, I did but give thee a few pretty trinkets, a few pretty words, and a few pretty caresses, and thy virtue went to pieces, like a rotten apple under a cart-wheel."

"Why, thou infamous pitiful wretch, how dost dare say such things of me?" exclaimed the Lady Arabella, looking as terribly indignant, and as horribly enraged, as a bad woman could, who is taunted with her infamy. "Thou hast had the villany to plot my undoing—thou hast sought me, flattered, fondled, and betrayed me to my ruin—day after day thou hast sworn thy honourableness and thy undying affection into my deluded ears, and I believing—poor fond fool!—thy prodigal oaths and protestations, left a worthy gentleman who loved me as his life—left home, friends, all things that were most worthy of my caring for, to cling to such baseness as I have here before me!"

"Well said, Moll, o' my life well said!" he observed, as if applauding her to the echo. "I read the same notable speech, word for word, in a book of jests I had t'other day of one of my lord's players. I should not have credited thy memory was so good."

"Get thee gone, thou pestilent jackal, to the lion thy master," cried his companion, with no little bitterness; "thy riotous ill-living hath brought thee to such a pass, that thou art a disgrace to thy family, and a shame to thy friends, and can only continue thy discreditable existence by coney-catching for some more prodigal villain than thyself." At hearing this the other took to whistling, yet he did it with so ill a grace, 'twas evident he was in no humour for music. "Out on thee, thou cozening rascal!" continued she, with increasing emphasis; "away, thou contemptible cheat! What new trick hast learned to take gulls by? Art not in a brave humour for stealing? Wouldst cut a purse—wouldst cog—wouldst foist—wouldst forswear thyself a thousand times? Go get thee a rope for thine own hanging, and thou wilt save the constables the trouble of carrying thee to the gallows!"

"Hold thy cursed prate, thou foul-mouthed ronyon!" said the gallant, in that deep sort of voice which usually heralds a monstrous passion.

"Thou art a scurvy knave that would willingly do such dirty work as other men would scorn," replied the lady with infinite disgust.

"Away, thou callet!" exclaimed the other contemptuously. "Thou wouldst needs pass for a lady, forsooth, and hast a monstrous hankering after gentility. Fine o' my life! Moll Crupper a lady! Alack, for good manners! The sadler's daughter transformed into Lady Arabella Comfit. Here's goodly coney-catching! A fine morning to you, an' it please you, my lady! I commend myself very heartily to your ladyship's excellent consideration. Believe me, I am infinitely bound to you for your ladyship's exquisite sweet condescension, and very humbly take my leave of your ladyship's most absolute and very admirable noble nature."

So saying, her companion, with a profusion of mock respect, was making his way towards the door, when Moll Crupper, who liked so little to be minded of her bad disposedness, evidently liked less to be told of her low origin, for she darted from her chair with a violent execration, and sprung upon her accuser with the fury of a tigress, pulling him by the hair with one hand, whilst she curried his face famously with the other. But this was borne with anything save patience by the gallant. No lack of coarse abuse mingled with the commonest oaths accompanied her endeavours to do him hurt, till after twisting her wrists till she desisted of her attack, and cried out with the pain, he pushed her away from him with such force, that she fell on the floor as if every sign of life had fled. This put the gallant in some sort of fear, for he had many reasons for wishing at that moment no great harm should happen to her, so he ran and lifted her up with an extraordinary shew of affection. But the pretended lady was far from being dead. She knew what was going forward, and was disposed to take advantage of it, for she was well aware she could not exist without the assistance of her companion. She remained motionless as a stone, till her associate in villany had exhausted every epithet of affection upon her, and every species of execration upon himself. Then she gradually opened her eyes, gradually employed her limbs, and gradually found the use of her tongue, as she had been in the habit of doing during a long series of similar conflicts.

"What a wretch have I been to use thee so uncivilly, my sweet life," said he, with all a lover's fondness, as she rose from the floor, half reclining in his arms, drawing her hands over her face with a look that bespoke a perfect unconsciousness of what had been going forward. "I know not what devilish spirit possesseth me. 'Slight, I could go and beat out my brains against a post, I feel such hatred of myself; for never truer woman lived than thou art, my dear Moll, and so exquisite a creature to love, I shall never meet any where."

"Nay, nay, I have been to blame, sweetheart," replied the fictitious Lady Arabella very kindly. "I had no need to have angered thee, for thou hast ever been a monstrous deal more good to me than I have deserved."

"Say not so, my wanton," exclaimed her companion with increased affectionateness. "Thy deserts are beyond all reckoning, and I hold thee in such absolute love as cannot cease unless my life be extinguished."

"Dear heart, how I love thee for saying that," cried she, in a perfect ecstacy. "Thou art a noble, bountiful, brave gentleman as ever breathed, and I care not a rush for the finest fellow that wears a head, for he can be nought in comparison with thy inestimable sweet goodness."

What followed may be readily imagined. Each of these two worthies, who a moment since joined so soundly in mutual abuse, and were desperate to do some mischief, now held up each other's qualities as beyond all parallel, and would have gone through all manner of dangers to have saved the other from hurt. But these sort of scenes had been common with them for a long time past. They caressed, abused, and drubbed one another with infinite heartiness—and the next moment caressed, abused, and drubbed, and with more heartiness than ever. But it so happened on this occasion, having gone through the regular series, they left off at the first stage of the next, in consequence of the gallant being forced to take his departure without further delay.

CHAPTER XV.

And then THE LOVER
Sighing like furnace, with a woful ballad
Made to his mistress's eyebrow.
SHAKSPEARE.

He coude songes make and well endite,
Juste and eke dance, and wel pourtraie and write.
So hote he loved that by nightertale
He slep no more than doth the nightingale.
Curteis he was, lowly, and servisable,
And carf before his fader at the table.
CHAUCER.

If I had wytt for to endyte
Off my lady both fayre and free,
Of her goodnesse then wolde I write—
Shall no man know her name for me.
OLD SONG.

SIR MARMADUKE DE LARGESSE, his worthy chaplain, and his old acquaintance the Antiquary, were sitting round a table in the library, seemingly wonderfully intent upon something. The good old Knight sat back in his seat, with one hand upon the handle of his rapier, and the other resting upon the arm of his high-backed chair, his benevolent cheerful countenance impressed with a sort of curious pleasure, and his white beard and hair looking more silvery than ever they had. At a little distance from him sat Sir Johan, getting to be almost as lustily limbed as his patron, his plump sleek features proving he had as much reason to be as prodigally grateful to Providence as he had been at any time; and also exhibiting in his countenance a pleasant mingling of curiousness and satisfaction. Both of these gazed upon Master Peregrine, who, with as much of the pantaloon in his appearance as ever, sat forward leaning of his elbows on a large book open upon the table, his hands holding a paper, and his eyes peering through his spectacles with a marvellous gratification, sometimes at his companions and anon at what he held in his hands.

"Never read I anything so sweetly fashioned!" exclaimed he. "I remember with what singular exquisite satisfaction I first read the most choice ballads of Fair Margaret and Sweet William, Lord Thomas and Fair Eleanor, and Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard, but the pleasure was nought in comparison with what I felt on perusing this most rare writing."

"Marry, give me Chevy Chace, or the Battle of Otterbourne!"

cried Sir Marmaduke. "I never hear a verse of either but it stirreth me like a very trumpet."

"I deny nothing of their excellence," observed the chaplain; "but who could for a moment compare them with the inestimable sublimity of Pindar, the luscious sweetness of Anacreon, or the moving melodiousness of Musæus? I do assure you, that among the Greeks—to say nought of the Romans—there is such brave store of odes, songs, and elegies of the very choicest sort, as doth exceed all possible comprehension."

"Tut, tut!" replied the Antiquary, impatiently; "wouldst make me believe there hath ever been anything writ, or thought of, more gallant than Havelok the Dane, more pastoral than Harpalus, or more touching than Lady Greensleeves?"

"Beyond the possibility of doubting, worthy sir," answered Sir Johan; "there shall easily be found in Homer things more martial, in Theocritus things more natural, and in Sappho things more tender."

"Passion o' my heart! what hath become of thy wits, I wonder?" exclaimed Master Peregrine, in a manner between astonishment and indignation; "I marvel that thou shouldst essay to prove thyself such an addle brain."

"Nay, if any brains be addled, Master Peregrine, it must needs be your own," replied the chaplain; "for 'tis out of all sense and reason to slight the infinite choicer beauties of classic song for a parcel of silly old ditties."

"Silly old ditties!" echoed the enraged antiquary, looking over his spectacles, as though he had a mind to do Sir Johan some grievous harm. "Is 'Lustely, lustely let us saile forthe!' a silly old ditty? Is 'Kytt hathe lost hur key,' a silly old ditty? Is 'Jolly good Ale!' a silly old ditty? Is Guy of Colbronde, or Sir Tristrem, or John Dory, or a thousand others of the like unmatchable perfectness, silly old ditties? thou shallow-witted, ignorant, poor goose, thou!"

"I cry you mercy, my masters," exclaimed Sir Marmaduke, good-humouredly, as he had oft done on many similar occasions. "When you get to talk of these matters, you are like unto two lusty bulls, who cannot enter the same pasture without going to loggerheads. Surely, in advocating the excellency of a thing, there is no argument in squabbling."

"Silly old ditties!" repeated Master Peregrine, with considerable emphasis.

"For mine own part," continued the knight, "though I will in no way seek to lessen the estimableness of the ancient writers, either Greek or Latin, some how or other these same old ballads afford me that rare pleasure I have never found in songs of a more classic sort."

"Perchance, I am somewhat to blame, in having expressed myself so slightingly of such things," observed Sir Johan, whose orthodoxy never led him to oppose his patron's opinion; "I meant no offence, believe me. Indeed, I do opine some of these excellent fine ballads, so liked of my esteemed friend here, are of a wonderful delicate conception; but Providence, who is ever so exceeding bountiful, hath wisely ordained us different tastes, that one liking one thing, and another liking something different, no one thing should exist without being held in some estimation."

"Silly old ditties!" Master Peregrine *would* have said again, but his better nature prevailed, and he swallowed the muttered words; yet, with an air of triumph, as if he thought himself on a par with one of his beloved heroes of the Round Table.

"And now for that sweet song you have promised us," exclaimed Sir Marmaduke; "you have spoken of it so fairly, I am all impatient to be hearing it."

"O' my word, and so am I," replied his chaplain, eagerly; "and as Master Peregrine hath such famous judgment in these matters, I doubt not he hath a rare treat in store for us." At this compliment to his judgment, all trace of displeasure vanished from the features of the antiquary; and he said some civil speech, in modest denial of having more judgment than so learned as person as Sir Johan, took off his spectacles, wiped them carefully, replaced them, hemmed some twice or thrice, brought the paper somewhat closer to his nose, and with an appropriate serious manner read what is here set down:—

THE POET'S SONG OF HIS SECRET LOVE.

"Upon the dainty grass I lay me down
When tired labour on mine eyelids rest,
And then such glad solace I make my own,
As none can know, for none can be so bless'd.
For then my sweeting comes, so gallantlie,
I cannot but conceive she loveth me.

I prythee tell me not of such bright fires
As burn by day or night in yon fair skies;
For when I bring her to my chaste desires,
Sun, moon, and stars are shining in her eyes.
For then my sweeting, so well-favor'dlie,
With Heaven-like gaze declares she loveth me!

The tender blossoms blush upon their bowers,
The luscious fruit hangs trembling by the leaf;
But her rose-tinted cheek out-glows all flowers,
Her cherry lips of fruits I prize the chief.
For then my sweeting so delightsomelie,
Doth take her oath upon't, she loveth me!

Alack, what pity 'tis, such moving sight
Should cheat my heart within an idle dream!
'Tis fantasy that brings such loving light—
The fruit I never taste—but only seem;
Oh, would my sweeting, in all honestie,
Vouchsafe to give some sign she loveth me!

I take no pleasure now in pleasant sports,
I find no profit in books old or new;
I hie me where my life's fair queen resorts,
For she's my pastime and my study too:
And of my sweeting, say I urgentlie—
What would I give to know she loveth me!

Yet though my heart with her so long hath been,
  I know not she takes heed of my behood,
I gaze on her, yet care not to be seen—
  I long to speak and yet I keep aloof.
And whilst my sweeting fills my thoughts—Perdie!
How oft I think—*perchance* she loveth me.

Where'er I turn, methinks I see her face,
  If any lovely thing can there be found;
The air I breathe is haunted with her grace,
  And with her looks the flowers peep from the ground
I pray my sweeting, very earnestlie,
She may incline to say she loveth me.

But when from all fair things I travel far,
  Enwrapp'd within the shroud of darkest night;
She rises through the shadows like a star,
  And with her beauty maketh the place bright.
And of my sweeting breathe I tenderlie,
Fortune be kind, and prove she loveth me!"

"Indeed, 'tis a sweet ballad and a simple!" exclaimed Sir Marmaduke, who had listened with a famous attentiveness.

"And of a most chaste and delicate fancy," added his chaplain, who seemed not a whit less pleased. "O' my word, it is long since I have heard verses writ with so natural a grace, or of so truly dainty a conceit. It remindeth me of those exquisite simple tender poems, that are to be found here and there scattered amongst productions of the minor Greek poets."

"Dost not know by whom it is written, Master Peregrine," inquired the old knight, seemingly to prevent the scornful reply the antiquary was about making to Sir Johan's allusion to the superiority of the classic writers.

"No, nor can I guess," answered Master Peregrine; "I have never seen nor heard of it before, and I am in some doubt as to its exact age, yet I could venture to make a guess, from certain marks it hath, that it cannot be later than the time of Henry the Eighth."

"'Tis like enough," observed Sir Marmaduke. "Perchance, it may be one of those same ballads our young scholar hath learned of his mother, and hath copied for your express delectation, left it in the book, and so forgot it."

"Nay, that can scarce be," replied the Antiquary; "for he hath oft times told me he knew of no more than such as he had already given."

Just at this moment, the conversation was stopped by a knocking at the door, and the entrance of the very person they were speaking of, who received a hearty welcome from all, but particularly from the good old knight. William Shakspeare glanced around as if in search of some one, but evidently, by his looks, he saw not the one he wanted.

"What, hast had a bout at cudgel play?" exclaimed Sir Marmaduke, merrily, as he noticed the bandage that still remained upon William Shakspeare's wounded head. Thereupon, he presently told how he had got it, which seemed to set them marvelling greatly, and the old knight was much moved at hearing, that the fair creature he had helped to save from villains at Kenilworth was now completely in their power. He kept asking of questions about which way they went, and what sort of persons were they, intermingled with expressions of grief for the fate of the pretty damsel, and of hostility against her betrayers. He got, however, but indifferent answers, for in truth the youth knew a very little more than himself. Master Peregrine, whose appreciation of ballads was much higher than that of women, manifested no inconsiderable impatience at this turn in the conversation.

"Will Shakspeare!" cried he, at last; "Prythee, come here; I want thee awhile." The young student left Sir Marmaduke, and approached close to the Antiquary. "Thou wilt do me a service, if thou wilt tell me where gettest thou this ballad." William Shakspeare glanced his eye at the paper, and on the instant, a very perceptible blush mantled his fair features. "Where didst have it from?"

"I wrote it, an' it please you, worthy sir," answered the young student, somewhat falteringly.

"Ay, 'tis in thy hand, I see; but whence came it?" inquired the other, more urgently.

"By'r lady, I do suspect the young rogue hath made it of his own invention," exclaimed the old knight.

"So think I," added his chaplain.

"Ey; dost mean to say these delicate verses are out of thine own head?" cried the Antiquary, in exceeding astonishment.

"Indeed, they are truly of my poor inditing," replied the young poet, modestly. Scarce were the words well out of his mouth, when Master Peregrine, in an ecstacy of admiration, threw his arms round his neck, and hugged him as though he were a prodigal son returned to his old father after a long absence.

"Why, thou delectable sweet rogue!" exclaimed he, "where didst get such admirable choice ideas?"

"Methinks, 'tis plain enough whence they proceeded," observed Sir Johan, with marvellous satisfaction. "I have taken huge pains for some length of time our young friend should have a proper acquaintance with the treasures of classic song, both Greek and Latin; and 'tis an easy matter to see how much my scholar hath profited by my instruction; for, as I said when I first heard those verses, they do remind me powerfully of some specimens of the minor Greek poets."

"Remind thee of a fig's end!" exclaimed Master Peregrine, contemptuously. "Cannot any one see with half an eye—save those ignorant poor coxcombs who are blind as bats—that this is a true ballad of the choice old school; and is it not well known what extreme pains-taking I have had with this my scholar from the first, that he should be well grounded in ballad lore; and lo! here is my reward—which, in very truth, exceedeth my most sanguine expectations."

"Nay, I will be bound by his answer," said the chaplain, not at all disposed to give up the honour of having produced so creditable a scholar. "Prythee declare, my excellent young friend, whether I have not, at all convenient times, bespoke thy commendation of all that was most admirable in classic song?"

"That have you, honoured sir, and I thank you very heartily," replied the youthful Shakspeare. Sir Johan looked satisfied.

"And tell me this, my king of nightingales," cried Master Peregrine, too confident of his own right to allow of being deprived of them. "Have I not taken opportunity by the hand with thee, to make thee familiar with the rarest ballads that ever were writ?"

"Indeed you have, worthy sir, and I shall feel beholden to you all my life long," answered the young poet. Sir Guy never looked so triumphant as did our antiquary.

"I will maintain, those verses are of the true lyric fashion," observed Sir Johan, "and therefore they cannot help being the result of acquaintance with their classic prototype."

"Classic pudding!" exclaimed Master Peregrine, getting to be somewhat in a rage. "If any will prove to me these verses are Greek verses, or Latin verses either, then will I allow they came of such teaching; but since it is plain to common sense, that what I here hold is a ballad, and moreover an English ballad, and moreover an English ballad of the true simple, graceful, chaste style of English ballad writing, methinks it shall want no conjuror to say it had its origin in that inimitable famous school, and oweth not one jot to Greek or Latin, or any such pitiful, poor, weak, dull, shallow, unprofitable rubbish."

"Rubbish!" cried the chaplain, astonished and indignant in no small measure; and he would doubtless have expressed himself with some force to that effect, had not Sir Marmaduke at that moment stopped him, by asking William Shakspeare if he had written anything of the sort before. To which he replied it was his first attempt: and to further questions answered, he had been reading of some choice love songs, and all at once he had a great desire to essay something of a like kind. Thereupon he got paper, and with a pen wrote those lines, which, not thinking much of, he had left in the book, intending to try and do something better at another time. This made all marvel greatly.

Certes, it was far out of ordinary things to find one, still a boy as it might be said, wooing of the Muses in such proper style. Yet, though none saw it, there had been gradual preparation of this for some time. The youthful poet had held communion with the philosophy of nature for years past, through that spirit of intelligence which breathes o'er all which belongeth to the beautiful and the good. He had laid down to dream of it; he had woke up to worship it. Wherever he went he beheld its presence. In all seasons he had felt its influence. The voices of the murmuring river called to him in his solitude—the shadows of the deep dark woods fell upon his thoughts—the opening glade, the far-off hills, and the fair skies, in all their glorious pageantry, haunted his hours of rest—the silent night rung with the echoes of a thousand songs tuned by the rarest band of forest choristers; and even in the chillest winter, when trees bear nought but icicles, and the hard ground is smothered with frost and snow, where'er he walked the choicest flowers bloomed in their most fragrant robes—the sun smiled lovingly before his eyes; and verdure, sweetness, and beauty made for him, all around, a garden of the very exquisitest delight.

But of late he had felt a something more than this; all the lovingest things of nature he had made of his familiar acquaintance, and had found in them such wisdom as nature never hath bestowed elsewhere; but to comprehend this wisdom in its fullest meaning required the assistance of an interpreter. This interpreter was Love. This Love though, let it be known, as yet he was content with knowing at a distance. He had seen of him but little, just enough to know him by, and liked not appearing too bold a visitor, but rather a respectful acquaintance or humble poor friend, that would be glad of some help, but dare not, out of reverence, attempt any such familiarity as the acquainting him with his wants. Nevertheless he had managed, in this slight companionship, to acquire at his hands some small portion of that power which argueth a knowledge of all natural wisdom—and that was poetry. It had made its appearance like a fresh pure spring trickling in the delicatest clearest drops down a fair hill covered with verdure and studded with all manner of sweet blossoms; and now having it at its source, all that is to be done is to trace the progress of the stream, till it rushed a mighty river into the great ocean of immortality.

Finding that Sir Valentine had gone to join a hunting party some miles off, the young poet bent his steps homewards in great trouble of mind, because he knew not what to do regarding the poor foundling. As he was crossing a field, so lost in his musings as to be perfectly regardless of all other things, on a sudden a pair of hands from some one behind caught him round the head and blindfolded him, and a loud laugh burst from several voices, after that fashion used by boys when they have succeeded in playing off any famous drollery.

"Now, Will!" cried one, "use thy wits, I prythee, and tell us who hath hold of thee?"

"Nay, let me hear the voice," replied William Shakspeare, taking their pleasantry in very good part, though he felt not in the humour to join in it as heartily as he was wont.

"Odds codlings, that thou shalt, I'll warrant," answered a trembling old woman's voice close behind him; "for as I was a saying no later than the week before last Martlemas, over a brave fire in the chimney corner of neighbour Bavins——"

"Why, Mother Flytrap!" exclaimed the youthful Shakspeare, who had listened in exceeding astonishment, "how didst get so close to me and I not know it?" At this the laugh was louder than before.

"Here is a vile world!" cried some one in the dismalest tones ever heard; "here is a monstrous villany! How darest thou do such intolerable wickedness as to play the infamous game of hot-cockles in so holy a place as the church-yard?"

"I, Oliver Dumps!" exclaimed the blinded youth in huge consternation: "believe me, I have not played at hot-cockles this many a day." Whereupon the young rogues appeared as though they would have rolled themselves in the grass, they enjoyed themselves to such excess.

"An' it pul-pul-pul-pul please you," stuttered another familiar voice, "mum-mum-mum-mum master says, he wer-wer-wer-wer wants you to send him word—wer-wer-wer-wer what sixpenny gloves are a pair!"

"Why, sixpence, to be sure, Dickon," replied the other. "But I have a monstrous suspicion thou hast been sent on a fool's errand." Upon this all laughed so long and loudly, it looked as if there would be no end to their mirth.

"O' my life, now, here is Tom Greene at his tricks again!" said William Shakspeare all at once, for the other had betrayed himself by vainly attempting to stifle his laughter, and at this the bands were taken off his eyes amidst the uproarious shouting of the whole party, and turning round, he beheld his old schoolfellows, Greene, Burbage, Condell, and Hemings, staggering about with all sorts of strange motions, and filling the air with peal after peal of laughing.

"I was thinking of another matter, Tom," said the youthful Shakspeare, "else should I have found thee out much sooner, for all thou art so famous a mimic."

"Was ever so rare a jest played!" exclaimed one with a handsome cheerful countenance. "No hungry luce ever took a hooked gudgeon more unsuspiciously than did Will Tom's well-managed baits. Mother Flytrap, Oliver Dumps, and stuttering Dickon, he would have sworn were behind him with as little remorse as a pig eats chestnuts; yet I will forswear pippins and marchpane if any other spoke save Tom Greene."

"I'faith! the cheat was well managed, Dick, I will allow," answered young Will; "but Tom is so Proteus a varlet, 'tis an easy matter for him to play the old woman, or perchance make such a wittol of himself as Dickon, or even take off the melancholy constable till such time as the melancholy constable may choose to take off him."

"What, wouldst have me in the stocks, thou rogue?" exclaimed Tom very merrily. "Marry! I like not such hose to my legs. But come, let us play a play, Will; we have not had that pleasant pastime of ours for weeks past."

"A play, Will—a play, I prythee!" cried Dick Burbage. "We have been looking for thee far and near, for I have got me a right mirthful interlude which my father hath left behind him, and if thou wilt take a part, we will do it in brave style, I warrant."

"Nay, let us have Gammer Gurton again!" said a stout sturdy little fellow, rather urgently.

"Thou art ever for playing Gammer Gurton, Condell," observed a tall sharp-looking boy. "Let us have that goodly play of the Four P's. Will Shakspeare can do the Poticary, Dick Burbage the Pedlar, Tom Greene the Pardoner, and I the Palmer."

"And prythee, what shall *I* do in it, Hemings?" asked Condell.

"As I live, thou shalt have enough to do!" replied his companion; "for thou shalt play the part of all the spectators." At hearing this there was another good laugh amongst them.

"At present I have neither time nor humour for playing," answered William Shakspeare; "nor can I tarry a moment longer, for pressing matters hurry me away." This answer was evidently but little relished by any of the party, and they tried no lack of entreaties and persuasion to get him to join in their sports. Nevertheless they could not prevail in any way, and finding such to be the case, they parted with him at the top of Henley-street, and straightway made for a field called Salisbury-piece, to have a play by themselves.

John Shakspeare had been inquiring of the neighbours the whole morning long; but getting no intelligence of his son, he had returned with a little misgiving to his anxious wife. With her he found the widow Pippins, in as merry a mood as ever, and Mistress Malmsey and Mistress Dowlas looking with such kindness and comeliness as if they never intended to lessen the pleasantness of their features or behaviour; and they had stepped in, hearing that William was not to be found, to offer their advice and sympathy, and hopes for the best, to their somewhat desponding neighbour. The widow had just described an exquisite jest she had played upon a drunken falconer, by abstracting the game from his bag, and putting therein a litter of kittens she had drowned the day before, and the aldermen's wives were laughing heartily to induce their sad-hearted gossip to follow their goodly example. At this moment returned John Shakspeare from his fruitless errand, who was assailed by a whole succession of questions from all the women, to which his answers appeared in no way satisfactory, for though they spoke very forcibly their convictions, he was in this place or in that, beyond all contradiction, they marvelled exceedingly where he could have got to.

"It is so little like him to play the truant with us," observed Dame Shakspeare, striving to appear more satisfied with the matter than she was. "Indeed, he giveth me but small cause of blame, save that he will sometimes be poring over a book when he should be taking of his proper rest."

"Well, it doth puzzle me famously to know what some folks see in books," said the merry widow. "For mine own part, I care not for the best that ever was writ, unless it be a book of jests or riddles, and then I must have some one to read them, for reading never took to me, and therefore 'tis natural I never took to reading. By my troth, now I do remember as fine a jest as ever was I played upon Sir Nathaniel, with a certain book of riddles that was left at my house by a strolling minstrel."

The widow Pippins had scarce commenced her narrative, when the door opened, and he whom they had been in such travail about, made his appearance. All manner of exclamations saluted his entrance; some began to scold, and some to question, but he took no heed of them till he had received his mother's caresses, and then very readily made them acquainted with all that had happened to him. Here was famous matter for marvelling, and none of the gossips allowed it to lie idle on their hands. The aldermen's wives, who knew every body and every thing, entered into a famous history of Mabel. As for the forcible abduction, some considered it done by the parents to recover their child secretly, others suspected it was a scheme of Tom Lucy, assisted by some of his college companions as wild as himself, with no honest intention, but the widow stuck out it was nothing more than a jest of Sir Thomas's to afford himself a new subject for boasting of his marvellous cleverness in the playing of tricks.

Having exhausted all they had to say upon the subject, the gossips took their departure, and John Shakspeare was left to the society of his wife and children. Of him it may be necessary here to say, he had gone on struggling, but the same reverses met all his exertions. He could scarce get a living even in the humblest manner, and he was often reduced to the saddest shifts that poverty can endure, but he went on with the same resolution, making no complaint to any, and striving to appear as contented as the rest. As for John a Combe, he proceeded much in the same way—unsocial, uncharitable, careless of his own comforts, and heedless of that of others—never opening his mouth to any person, save in the way of business, unless to breathe such bitterness of heart as shewed the fearful change that had come over his once noble and generous nature. But what had worked this fearful change none knew. The effects were terribly conspicuous. Every one beheld them and grieved at them; and put up with his uncivilness out of respect for the honourableness of his behaviour at an earlier time. Yet of the cause the most knowing of the gossips of the town knew nothing whatever. They marvelled more and more every day, till its commonness took off the edge of their wonder.

CHAPTER XVI.

The subject of all verse
Sydney's sister, Pembroke's mother.
BEN JONSON.

Give place, ye lovers, here before
That spent your boasts and brags in vain;
My lady's beauty passeth more
The best of yours, I dare well faine,
Than doth the sun the candle light,
Or brightest day the darkest night.
LORD SURREY.

Art thou my son, that miracle of wit,
Who once, within these three months, wert esteemed
A wonder of thine age throughout Bononia?
How did the university applaud
Thy government, behaviour, learning, speech,
Sweetness, and all that could make up a man!
FORD.

Both flowers and weeds spring when the sun is warm,
And great men do great good or else great harm.
WEBSTER.

IN an anteroom adjoining of the queen's presence chamber, in her highness's palace of Nonsuch, there was a famous company of lords and ladies in different groups. Here would be a famous party of gallants paying of their court to the fairest of the throng, whereof the greater number were exceeding fair, and she was no other than Lady Rich, usually styled "the beautiful Lady Rich," and well she deserved so admirable a title, for nought could exceed the sweet exquisiteness with which the lily and the rose united their choicest graces to deck her delicate cheek; or the soft subduing light that shone so delightsomely within the fountains of her radiant looks. All her features were of the same unrivalled perfectness, and over them the spirit of beauty breathed so wooingly, that such as gazed upon the temple were irresistibly drawn there to pay their devotions. Foremost in the circle of her admirers was one who, by the choiceness of his dress, the neatness of his speech, and the studied courtliness of his manner, was manifestly born only to shine in the atmosphere of a court. Every thing about him spoke the desire to please, and the ready smile that accompanied the delicate flattery, appeared to prove how aptly he could receive pleasure of another. This was Sir Christopher Hatton, the very mirror of courtesie and text-book of compliment, and the most finished courtier of his day. His apparel was not more dainty than his phrases, and his behaviour was of a kind fittest to accord with both. He moved as though he thought himself under the eyes of the Graces, having every gesture so properly produced, it went not a hair's breadth from the mos graceful position that could be accomplished under the circumstances. His features were so fashioned as to make all fair weather in his kalendar. The sun shone every day in the week. There was no winter, no clouds, no eclipses. He would as soon have hanged himself as frowned. He would sooner have thrown himself into the Thames river than allowed an uncivil word to escape him. What was his age it would be difficult to guess with any exactness, for as he had been heard to say he considered age to be an exceeding vulgar fellow with whom he would hold no acquaintance, it is possible he disguised himself as much as he could to prevent his being known by so rude a person.

But Sir Christopher was not without possessing something of other talent beside the courtly accomplishments of fencing, dancing, and compliment, nevertheless his whole ambition was to apply such gift as part of the necessary appliances of a courtier, and he never made use of it, save only to help him at a pinch to exhibit his continual desire to please. About him were divers gallants and young gentlemen of the palace, who looked up to him as their model, and framed their speech, their apparel, and their behaviour, as nigh as might be to their great original. His last phrase by their means travelled quickly to all persons choice in their speech; and it was by the same assistance the last new step of his came into use amongst such as wished to be considered the very fashionablest dancers of the time.

In the recess of a window that looked out upon the grounds were another group, the cynosure of which appeared to be a lady of a most delectable presence, whose ample delicate forehead and intelligent gaze, gave token of as rare a mind as ever was worthy of the choicest and beautifulest framing. She was a notable instance of woman's perfectness,—whose moving graces created the exquisitest thoughts in the minds of those gifted ones who came within their influence; but the poetry of her own nature was full as exquisite as any that she called into being. Her voice breathed its very atmosphere—and her eyes were such bright casements, within which it hath ever loved to find its home. It is no marvel then she should be so much the admiration of all true lovers of excellence—that her good opinion should be so much coveted of such as sought after praise that is the most valuable, or that her smiles made wherever she went a midsummer garden of the mind's unfading flowers. Methinks 'tis scarce necessary to add that her perfect modesty kept worthy companionship with her noble mind, for it may be taken as an indisputable truth that high intelligence doth ever signify the presence of moral feelings equally exalted. Be sure that where the mind displays itself in its most sterling character, there is no alloy of any baseness. It is clean impossible it can be otherwise, for however it may sometimes seem, nature alloweth of no such unnatural alliances. Signs of great intellect may appear where want of goodness is equally manifest, but the former of these signs, on close scrutiny, turn out to be not so admirable as they look—in fact, instead of being the sterling gold in its native purity, they are only such ores as require so much cleansing to put them into use, as will hardly repay the labour. It may perchance have been found that their preciousness hath had a bad look with it, but it only followeth of the rubs it may get of such base things as it may come in contact with. It is still as sterling as ever, despite appearances; and fair usage will keep it in that brightness it ought always to wear.

Leaning affectionately over the countess's chair, was a young gallant of a like noble brow, and of an aspect somewhat similar in its intelligent expression. There was something more of gravity, and there was something less of sweetness in the countenance, yet there were the same highmindedness beaming out of the sparkling eyes, and a similar thoughtful eloquence smiling around the corners of the delicate mouth. It was easy to be seen by this likeness, and by the tender familiarity with which one behaved to the other, that they stood in some relationship. They were brother and sister. Such a brother and sister as the world sees not in many ages,—perchance, may never see again, for they were not more alike in the admirableness of their outward lineaments, than they were in all manner of moral and mental qualities. Where shall we meet with another Countess of Pembroke—the ready patroness of merit, yet outshining all merit with her own; ever ready to pay her homage to virtue, yet in herself possessing such virtue as exceeded all other examples? And where shall we look for another Sir Philip Sydney—the soul of honour, the spirit of chivalry, the courtliest among the courtly, and the bravest among the brave—though scarcely in the full dawning of his manhood, his wisdom went beyond that of the most experienced counsellors, and though formed, by the choicest gifts of nature, to fill the proudest seats in the chiefest places of greatness, his ambition never went beyond the performing of valiant and generous deeds, writing worthily on honourable subjects, living with a proper respect, and dying with a becoming nobleness. In him knighthood possessed its last and rarest ornament, and manhood one of its most admirable examples. Genius acknowledged him as her son, and honour claimed him as her champion; and every virtue that could grace humanity, where all in him that was human was of so gracious a nature, might justly have put forth a boast, that in him they shewed to the world how well they could adorn a man.

It may readily be imagined that this truly gallant gentleman was the love, the model, and the admiration of all the gallant hearts of his age. Indeed, by such as possessed the genuine chivalrous spirit, he was regarded as a sort of deity. They considered no station so great as to be of his acquaintance, and no honour so estimable as to have his praise. It therefore followeth very naturally that Sir Reginald and Sir Valentine should have eagerly sought his friendship, the which their valour and honourable conduct gained for them; and this known, it is in no way surprising the former of these young knights should now be standing at his elbow joining in the conversation with Master Arthur Gorges, a young gallant of great worthiness—my Lord Buckhurst, a nobleman favourably known to the Muses, and divers other knights and nobles, whose love of song went hand in hand with their admiration of true valour.

Besides these there were a great crowd of nobles, knights, and ladies, gallants, courtiers, officers of the queen's household, commanders by sea and land, learned judges, grave prelates, and others of her highness's loving subjects of different ranks and conditions, intent upon paying of their court to their sovereign, as soon as she concluded her audience with certain ambassadors with whom she was now closeted. There was a great variety in the colours of the different rich stuffs, but with the exception of some few in their robes, every gallant wore the same fashioned doublet, trunks, hose, and shoe roses, and every lady the same long stomachered dress with a stiff poking-out farthingale. Some were whiling the time by admiring the figures on the cloth of tissue. The commanders were conversing of the famous good fortune of Sir Francis Drake, in his last voyage. The ministers were speculating on the probability of the queen's marriage with the Duke of Anjou. The courtiers amused themselves with tales concerning of the differences between my Lord of Leicester and the Earl of Sussex. The gallants were putting off their last learned graces of behaviour on such of the fair dames they could get to heed them. The ladies were conversing either of the newest Venetian fashion, or the latest jest of Master Tarleton, her highness's jester. And the judges and prelates were lamenting together the intolerable evils of witchcraft and papistry; but the circle around the Countess of Pembroke and Sir Philip Sydney were bewhiling the hour in a manner more profitable to themselves, than did any of the others,—as I will here endeavour to shew.

"Touching the capabilities of our nature," observed that illustrious scholar, "I am inclined to believe there is no greatness it may not aim at. But there can be no true greatness independent of the affections, for these are the springs that do refresh the ground, and make it bear the noblest and choicest plants at all proper seasons."

"I cannot help thinking the same thing," added his sister. "Perchance there have been philosophers to whom all such feeling as love appeared utterly unknown; they might have scoffed at it in themselves and ridiculed it in others; but such examples should be looked upon as the result of unnatural circumstances—like unto flowers that lose their colour by growing in the dark—or fruits that part with their flavour by being planted in an improper climate. That is sure to be the truest wisdom that cometh of the most benevolent mind, for it embraces the whole world with some everlasting truth which hath universal happiness for its object; whilst the philosophy of such as have no such feeling in their hearts can be born only of books; they are mere scholars that have no better object in view than raising themselves above their fellows, instead of striving to raise their fellows up to them. Such a philosopher attains celebrity only by feeding on those who went before him:—his cunning is of a like kind with that of the serpent of Moses, which swallowed up all the rest."

"Just so," said Sir Philip Sydney; "for if we notice how love works upon the mind, we shall readily come at the philosophy of the affections. Taking the two examples of this feeling in ordinary acceptance, to wit, the lover and the philanthropist, we immediately see how generous love hath made them in their notions,—the one is ready to undertake any danger in the conviction of his mistress's superiority to all her sex; the other would make any sacrifice to benefit those who required his assistance, in the express belief of the extreme worthiness of the whole human race. The valour of love is equal to its generosity; and methinks these twins of comeliness will be found together in every example of a true knight and complete gentleman. Nothing can be so valiant as love, which makes so undeniable the Latin adage which declareth that love conquereth all things,—for love hath achieved the brightest deeds that are the glory of chivalry. But as love granteth whatever is most admirable to the object of its regard, it seeketh by all honourable means to make itself of a like perfectness; and is thus by degrees led to the attainment of the noblest offices, and to the possession of the most honourable accomplishments that can be acquired."

"So I have thought, though, as must needs be, not in so excellent a fashion!" observed Sir Reginald.

"But surely these is a vast distinction between what is called gallantry and genuine affection?" exclaimed Lord Buckhurst. "There are hundreds of fine popinjays to be met with, protesting a monstrous affectionateness for every woman they meet, and I never saw in them any of the virtues of which you spoke."

"So are there hundreds that affect great religiousness," observed Sir Philip Sydney, "which is done not out of any true reverence, but merely because it is the fashion. But genuine gallantry is of an exceeding different nature. It is of a kin with that ancient worship that honoured all deities alike. Nevertheless, even in these instances, there will be found a niche in the temple of the heart dedicated to the service of some unknown god; and throughout the whole nature there exists a continual anxiousness to have that place worthily supplied. In good time such desire is accomplished; and be assured, the idol there placed hath more worship than all the rest together."

"The true worship of love is goodness," added the countess; "and it is a sign by which genuine affection may always be distinguished from mere profession. True love is purity, honesty, truth, honour, courtesy, and bravery confessed in action. Where there is any meanness, where there is any selfishness, uncivilness, cowardice, or villany, true love never abideth. Doubtless some may assert this sweetener of life hath been found with some such base accompaniments as I have just named; but out of all doubt the latter is entirely different, and should be avoided for its unwholesomeness. It is like unto such honey as divers sorts of wild bees have been known to make from poisonous flowers."

"But how rarely shall we find this love in all its perfectness and purity!" exclaimed Lord Buckhurst.

"Nay, my good lord, it is none so rare!" replied Sir Reginald, with some earnestness. "Wherever woman hath a fair field for the development of her infinite perfections, such love will follow, as naturally as light springs from the sun; and to a knowledge of these absolute graces originated that proud sense of honour, and true nobleness of feeling in man, which hath done such famous achievements throughout Christendom, under the estimable name of chivalry."

"True, Sir Reginald," observed Sir Philip Sydney, with a glance of approbation at his young friend. "There are two states of society, in all outward appearance, as far asunder as are the poles—where true love is ever to be met with. The one is the courtly empire of knights and ladies, which produceth the gallantest deeds and the honourablest behaviour—the other is the simple republic of shepherds and shepherdesses, where innocence is crowned with a garland of the freshest flowers of the field, and honesty jogs merrily along, enjoying the pleasant minstrelsy of the pipe and tabour."

"Which, think you, is the happiest state?" inquired Master Arthur Gorges.

"That in which the wants are the fewest, and the desires of easiest attainment," replied the other. "It is doubtful to which we ought to give the preference. Happiness may exist indifferently in either state; but, according to what we know of Arcadian manners, these same swains and nymphs must have enjoyed the most blameless sweet life ever heard of. I cannot imagine any more moving picture than a choice company of such, tending of their woolly flocks in the fresh pastures—or in the cool eventide dancing away the joyous hours, with their dainty sweet music; whilst in some green arbour nigh at hand, the enamoured Colin whispers a love tale to his blushing Daphne, and the seniors of the village sit under the shadow of the friendly trees, quaffing the rich juices of their vineyards, and telling of marvellous stories and merry jests."

"Ha! cousin Philip, art there again!" exclaimed the Earl of Leicester, in a pleasant manner, as he entered the circle, clothed with such gorgeousness as far exceeded all the tiring around. "Why thy moving descriptions of Arcadian life will presently make all persons of worship in a phrenzy to attain the like happiness. My Lord Burghley sweareth he hath serious thoughts of retiring from court, and keeping sheep at Theobalds. Sir Christopher Hatton hath been heard, for hours together, practising on a small pipe, in hopes of getting the queen's ladies to dance to his piping in the true rural style; and as for myself, I have been looking for weeks past for a crook and a shepherdess, that I may in the very properest manner sit me down in some enamelled plain, and there happily live out the remainder of my days, dividing of my cares betwixt my lambs and my love."

"Methinks, my lord, you would soon pine for the splendid pageantries you had left behind," observed the countess, with a smile.

"The gentle shepherd would be ever a sighing to be once again the most accomplished knight in the tourney," added Sir Philip Sydney, with a like pleasantness. "He would be right glad to change his seat on the enamelled plain for the saddle of his good steed—his crook for a spear—his flock for a company of valiant knights—and his faithful shepherdess for as many fair ladies as he could get to witness his admirable matchless prowess."

"Nay, prythee try me ere I am condemned," answered the earl, laughingly. "I doubt hugely I should be so easily tired. For is there not a famous variety of amusements? Could I not delight myself by carving of my true love's name wherever I could, till there should be found more Chloes on a tree than acorns? and then would I not sing such songs against the rival swains, of her unmatchable rare beauties, that they should be dumb ever after; and play on my pipe till the feathered choristers of the grove would hold themselves silent to learn of my wondrous skill."

"Perchance it may be so, my good lord," said the countess, in the same humour; "but take it not as want of courtesy in me, if I doubt the possibility of so great a marvel."

"Now, without flattery, never met I so perfect a disbeliever," exclaimed Leicester, gallantly. "I would the fates had so ordered it as to have made the Countess of Pembroke an Arcadian shepherdess, and I her scarce worthy, yet too happy swain. Methinks so enviable a lot exceedeth all honour of chivalry; and, whether, in the valley or the grove, at the dance or tending of my flock, believe me, the enjoyment of such rare happiness would put out of mind, as things only to be despised, such poor pleasures and distinctions as I have now in my possession."

"I am bound to you, my lord, for entertaining of such thoughts," replied his accomplished companion, courteously; "yet am I still of opinion, the noble place you now occupy would content you more than the most perfect state of shepherd life that is to be found. For as it is, you have in your power infinite opportunities of doing good, by affording your counsel and assistance to all such worthy objects as may require it; whilst, by your prominence in the public eye, you can, by acting as becomes your dignity, be an example of honour that every honourable nature would be glad to copy."

"Such I will strive to be with all my heart," exclaimed the earl, with a seeming great sincerity. "Indeed the most pleasurable part of the high station in which fortune, rather than my poor ability, hath placed me, I find to consist in the benefits I am enabled to confer on deserving persons. Nothing delighteth me more than to honour merit as it deserves; and I would gladly go out of my way any distance to meet with some worthy creature whom I could make happy."

Every one was famously pleased at hearing of so proper a speech from the Queen's favourite; but such was his usual manner, and such his customary words.

"Finding you, my good lord, in this happy mood," observed Sir Philip Sydney, "I would crave your countenance in behalf of a worthy friend of mine, who would be right proud of possessing it."

"Say who he is, and be assured of his merits' receiving proper attention at my hands," said Leicester.

"His name is Edmund Spenser," replied the other; "and I look upon him to be as true a poet as ever wrote verse."

"Prythee bring him to me whenever it suits you," said the earl, in his most winning manner. "I am all impatient to be acquainted with one who hath acquired such high honour as to be so lauded of Sir Philip Sydney."

"Believe me, my brother hath said no more than the worthiness of Master Spenser gives him title to," added the countess. "As far as I am capable of judging, he is one whom future ages will delight to reverence."

"I'faith, this Master Spenser hath great good fortune, methinks, to have his merits so approved by two such absolute judges," cried Leicester. "O' my life, I shall not be content till he number me among his friends. But though I am exceeding loath to leave such delectable society, I must fain hie me hence."

He had scarce uttered these words when he felt a nudge at his elbow, and, looking round, his eyes evidently met a familiar face, for, with a cheerful countenance, he called out, "Ha! Tarleton, what news?" The person he had so addressed, had a merry eye and a ruddy countenance; and in figure stood rather under the middle size—the which was neatly garmented in a suit of Lincoln green. This was no other than Tarleton the player, who was in such esteem of the Queen for his many witty jests, that it was thought of some he had as much influence with her as any man living. Being so great a favourite, he was allowed to do much as he pleased; and if his wit smacked of some sharpness, few were so unwise as outwardly to take offence at it. Then he had with him so odd a way of saying his drolleries, that he forced many to laugh who liked not being trifled with.

"News, quotha,!" replied the jester, after his comicalest manner; "ay, great news, I warrant. An honest intelligencer of my acquaintance told me, my Lord of Leicester was about going on an embassy to Prester John, with a suit of motley for his wear, and a case of toothpicks to hide in his beard."

"Marry, that is news indeed," answered Leicester, somewhat seriously; "and peradventure it came of the same honest intelligencer who assured me that one Tarleton, a player, stood in great likelihood of being committed to Bridewell for allowing of his wit to run foul of his discretion."

"Nay, o' my life, that is no news!" exclaimed the undaunted jester, "I have heard it this ten year; and the last time it was said in my hearing, there was added to it that my Lord of Leicester might have taken offence at the merry player, only the generousness of his nature put him above such ungraciousness."

"I tell thee what, Master Tarleton," said the earl, taking the other's humour very pleasantly, "there seemeth to be what learned mediciners call sympathy, in the effects of thy wit—for the weapon that makes the wound can as readily perform the cure."

"O' my life, yes, an' it please you, my lord," replied the jester, making of a mock doleful face exceeding ludicrous. "But my curing hath in it more of the cook than the chirurgeon—for it seemeth to be ever a getting me into a famous pickle." Thereupon there was a manifest sign of laughing in every face that stood within ear-shot.

"Peradventure that accounteth for the attic saltness of thy jests," observed Sir Philip Sydney.

"Ay, and if he selleth his wit he must needs be a salt-cellar," added Lord Buckhurst.

"Troth, then, let those who are below the salt look to their manners," said Master Tarleton. "But touching this conceit of the salt, if it is so, I shall be forced to keep me a respectful distance, else will every lewd fellow be taking a pinch of me with which to savour his porridge."

"Then will he have more wit in his porridge than ever he had in his head," said Leicester, good humouredly. "Take such pinches as lovingly as thou canst, Master Jester, for methinks 'tis this very saltness which keepeth thy wit so long good."

"I promise you," replied Master Tarleton. "But peradventure too much of that savour is like to get me the reputation of a dry wit."

"Nay, before thou canst be properly dried, thou must stand a good hanging," rejoined the earl, with a laugh, in which all joined.

"O' my life, I would as soon be put to the rack at once," said the jester, "and, in truth, I protest against being used so piggishly."

"Truly, thou art hard to please!" rejoined the earl, and then graciously taking his farewell of the countess and her party, he sauntered along on his way to the Queen's chamber. The courtiers thronged to pay their respects, and commanders, prelates, judges, and other dignitaries, seemed all alike anxious to gain his attention. Some were petitioners for his influence, others came to thank him for some favour conferred, and to all he was alike courteous:—listening patiently, and answering graciously; and as he went, took with him the good wishes of those he left behind. Spying the beautiful Lady Rich, encircled by her usual throng of admirers, he quickly made his way to her side, and soon proved himself the most accomplished gallant of them all. The compliments of others were insipid, in comparison with such as he offered, and the lovely object of them appeared to appreciate the distinction, for he received her most winning smiles.

"Many take me to be of some wealth," observed he to her, in that resistless sweet fashion he was so famed for; "but when I make comparisons, I cannot help thinking myself in a very monstrous poverty. It is long since I have beheld the poorness of my state, and envied some their greater fortune; yet I can say, in all honesty, were I Rich now, I should be rich indeed."

"Truly, I know not who should thank you most for that pretty speech of yours, my lord or myself," replied the beautiful creature with one of her exquisitest looks.

"I protest 'tis a very delicate choice conceit," said Sir Christopher Hatton, with his customary elegance of manner, as he raised a gold pouncet box to his nose; "infinitely worthy of my Lord of Leicester, his extreme sufficiency of wit; and absolutely corresponding with my Lady Rich, her rare prodigalness of merit." Whilst the young gallants around were endeavouring to impress this fine sentence on their memories, Tarleton, the jester, approached, and spying of Sir Christopher Hatton, he suddenly turned round and advanced backwards towards him, with every sign of a most serious courtesy, making a profusion of becks to a half blind old courtier in the distance, whereof the consequence was, he presently stumbled against Sir Christopher, and trod on his toes. Now, if anything would ruffle a man's temper, methinks it should be when he is essaying to make himself excessively agreeable to the loveliest woman of her age, one should drive against him awkwardly, and tread with some heaviness on his feet. All expected Sir Christopher would have been famously ruffled; but the accomplished courtier smiled upon the Queen's jester,—as Tarleton turned round with a grave indifferent face, on the instant he had done what there is but small doubt he intended—and with a most winning graciousness apologized for having been in his way.

"Nay, I hope I have not hurt you, sweet Sir Christopher!" exclaimed the merry player; "I was but paying of a proper courtesy to my Lord Bumble, and could not guess your worship was so nigh."

"I return you a bountiful load of thankfulness of your inquiries, worthy Master Tarleton," replied the text-book of compliment; "I will entomb such preciousness in my heart. Let your excess of goodness be gratified by the conviction I am in no way hurt."

"O' my life, I did think I trod on your toes somewhat heavily," said the jester, with extreme seriousness.

"Toes, worthy Master Tarleton," added the mirror of courtesy, with one of his blandest smiles, "belong only to vulgar persons. A gentleman hath no such pedal appurtenances. It may be said of such a one that he hath a handsome foot," continued he, looking at, and moving one of his feet into the gracefulest positions; "but to say he hath feet, is no sort of phrase for the politer sort; and toes are altogether banished from courtly language."

"Nay, if you are for depriving me of my toes, I must e'en take to my heels," answered the other, and thereupon made off from the circle with all speed.

In the meantime, the Earl of Leicester had whispered a quick succession of the delicatest flatteries into the ear of the smiling beauty he was addressing, which she seemed to receive, more as a homage long usage had accustomed her to, than from any particular excess of vanity in her nature. Thence he went to other lovely dames, where it was evident he was no less welcome; and finally, departed to the Queen's chamber, beyond all contradiction the most admired, the most courted, and the most honoured of all the gallant company assembled in that goodly chamber.

It was evening of the same day, when in a thick grove, at a bow-shot from the palace, a gallant, in a large horseman's cloak and a broad slouched hat, which completely concealed him from observation, was seen walking from tree to tree, backwards and forwards; sometimes whistling, sometimes humming a tune, but continually looking in one particular direction, as if he was in expectation of some person coming that way. Anon, he would grow impatient, and utter something that smacked of an oath: then he would wrap his cloak closer around him, lean against a tree, and amuse himself awhile by digging of his heels into the soil. In these pursuits he had been engaged for some length of time, when he became aware of the approach of some person, disguised after a like fashion as himself. It was evident, these were the same two persons that had stood together under the shadow upon the terrace of Kenilworth Castle. They exhibited a similar caution, and they behaved with a like mystery.

"What news?" inquired the new comer, in a low voice; "hast secured the prize? Hast not let her slip through thy fingers a second time?"

"Never was prize so secure, my lord," answered the other.

"Good! Exceeding good!" exclaimed the noble, as if with a wonderful excess of gratification.

"The former plot failed not from any lack of cunning in the planning," added his companion; "I was baulked of my success, just when I had made secure of it—a murrain on the pitiful fools who were so meddlesome! But, in this instance, fortune hath been more kind; and, though not without exceeding painstaking, I have been free from all possibility of any such pestilent interference."

"Then make sure, fortune shall be thy friend from this time forward," replied the one addressed as my lord. "But art sure none know into whose hands she hath fallen?"

"They could not have the slightest guess of it, I have managed matters so well," answered the other. "None saw her taken, none know where she is gone; and I have given her in charge to one, who is too perfect in her lesson, to allow of her prisoner's having knowledge of at whose suit she hath been arrested."

"I approve thy discretion infinitely," observed the nobleman; "I would not be known in the business, on any account, either to her or any other. But how doth she look, and how takes she her sudden removal from her friends?"

"'Tis beyond all art of mine to express her looks, my lord," replied his associate; "nought but your own eyes can do her exquisite perfections justice. Beautiful as she was, she hath made such progress in comeliness, that her present appearance putteth clean out of memory the graces she was then possessed of."

"O' my life, then she must be a most rare creature," exclaimed the other delightedly.

"Truly, she is, my lord, and were I in any way richer than I am, I would wager a dozen marks you will readily acknowledge, on beholding her, there lives not her peer in this world."

"Well, here is something for thy diligence," said his companion, giving him a well filled purse, which he took very readily. "But 'tis only a token of what shall follow, find I the original to come up to thy limning."

"Would I were as sure of all other things," exclaimed the other. "But I pray you take good speed in your coming, for she hath been made so curious about you, that if you come not straight, I know not what her impatience may lead her to."

"Be sure, the first moment I can without suspicion absent myself from court, I will fly like a hawk," replied the noble. "But in the meanwhile let her lack nothing by way of amusement to make her content with her condition. The players may be had to entertain her, or any other pastime she is likely to take pleasure in. Spare neither expense nor trouble. Have ever ready such variety of enjoyments that she can get tired of none; and so possess no time to reflect on any other matter, save the bountifulness of the provider."

"It shall be done, my lord, without delay."

"And mark me," continued his companion.

"Ay, my lord," answered the other.

"Let Mistress Crupper take proper heed that this sweet angel of mine firmly believeth herself to be amongst persons of worship. Let her manners be in accordance with her assumed station, at the same time that in every point she behaveth with the most delicate respect to her fair prisoner."

"I have already so ordered it," replied his associate; "and Moll knoweth her own interests too well to mar them by any misbehaving. I do assure you, my lord, she playeth her part in the choicest fashion—never a lady in the land could do it better."

"Provided that be the case, she shall have a suitable reward," said the nobleman. "But I must be gone. Haste back, and keep her in continual impatience of my coming. But above all things be cautious my name be not dropped on any consideration, nor aught done which might in any manner point to me as holding the slightest share in such proceedings."

"Rely on it, my lord," answered his companion, and so saying both departed their several ways, the one chuckling at the weight of the purse, which had rewarded his infamous proceedings, and the other congratulating himself on the apparent success of his villanous agent.

CHAPTER XVII.

I have been readie at your hand
  To grant whatever you might crave,
I have both waged life and land
  Your love and good will for to have.
I brought thee kerchers to thy head
  That were wrought fine and gallantly,
I kept thee both at board and bed,
  Which cost my purse well favouredly.
I bought thee petticotes of the best,
  The cloth as fine as might be;
I gave thee jewels for thy chest,
  And all this cost I spent on thee.
BALLAD OF LADIE GREENSLEEVES.

Thou art a shameless villain!
A thing out of the overcharge of nature:
Sent like a thick cloud to disperse a plague
Upon weak catching women! Such a tyrant
That for his lust would sell away his subjects,
Ay, all his Heaven hereafter.
BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

MABEL was left in as bad hands as it could be possible for her to fall into. It is a question whether so vile a pair could elsewhere have been met with—a matter of huge congratulation to all virtuous minds. These two were thoroughly heartless, because thoroughly selfish—lost to all sense of shame from being deaf to every murmur of conscience—careless of report, knowing they had no character to lose, and wishing only to live, out of extreme disinclination to die. They had been in companionship with each other for years, believing such villany as they possessed would only be tolerated by those who were most familiar with it; but their bad passions were ever breaking forth, and it appeared as if they were allowed to live the better to remind each other of the monstrous baseness of their behaviour.

All that such wretches could do, aided by the most consummate hypocrisy, and with every help unbounded wealth could procure, was essayed to render the pure mind of the poor foundling accessible to the villany that had been devised against her. Turn where she would, her eyes met images of voluptuousness—and at all times her ears were invaded with meanings in opposition to all honourable notions; but the extreme craft of this overthrew itself. The mind of the gentle Mabel was so essentially pure, that although it would admit readily every image of beauty, such characters came there completely divested of aught of an objectionable shape, and her nature was so perfectly innocent, that indelicacy of any sort was to her a foreign language, which she heard but could not understand. Whereof the consequence was she remained, despite of all this great expenditure of subtlety, as chaste in heart as the day she first entered those polluted walls.

If anything could lead a woman from her own integrity, the incense which was continually being offered to her vanity, in artful praises of her person, and in the constantly varying costliness of its decorations, might have sufficed; but the vanity of the poor foundling seemed so remotely seated, that this precious artillery never touched it. She took the flattery as said out of goodness; and wore the apparel as sent out of kindness.

Many days had passed and Mabel still remained unconscious of her danger, and in less anxiousness concerning of the old knight and the good dame, than she was at first, because her assumed friend, the fictitious Lady Comfit, had assured her she had informed them of her safety and comfort. Her only desire was that the youthful sleeper, who had got himself so roughly used for her sake, might not have been much hurt, and that she should be allowed some early opportunity of thanking him for his extreme readiness to help her in her need. She was rarely left alone, and scarce a moment was allowed her for reflection: and the conversation of her crafty companion kept her in a constant state of marvel, admiration, and curiousness concerning of the princely gentleman who had, as she thought, taken such strange means to shew his love for her. One day, as it were by accident, she had been left by herself, and naturally fell to musing on the mystery of those transactions in which she had been made so prominent a feature. She sat clothed in all the splendour of Venice and Milan—and it might be truly said her beauty more became her tiring than her tiring improved her beauty

—her arm rested on the side of the richly carved chair, with the full sleeve falling back disclosing its perfect whiteness and symmetry, clasped by a bracelet of purest gold and jewels, and her fair face was supported by her hand, of which the delicate fingers were half lost in the meshes of her glossy hair. Her radiant eyes were fixed upon the fresh rushes at her feet, but their long silken lashes gave so soft an expression to the deep sweet thoughtfulness of her exquisite countenance, that it is doubtful their full gaze could have appeared more admirable.

Thus she thought over the recent events, bewildered with their strangeness, and perplexed as to their purport, till she was suddenly startled from her reverie.

"Heavens! how exquisitely beautiful!" exclaimed a deep-toned voice; and looking up, to her exceeding astonishment, she observed a tall person, enveloped in a huge cloak, and his head covered with a broad beaver hat, consequently she could see of him nothing but his face, which seemed nobly featured, and the eyes lustrous with a very passionate adoration. She had scarce had a moment for thinking who this stranger could be, and what he wanted, when the cloak and hat fell at his feet, and she beheld a stately figure, clad in such magnificence as she had had no imagination of. The delicatest white silk, daintily embroidered with gold, formed his hose; and his doublet was of a light pink, fancifully ornamented with the choicest pearls, having the sleeves quaintly trimmed and slashed with amber satin, like unto the round full part of his trunks. His ribbon garters and shoe roses were of a corresponding costliness; and as some sign of his nobility, he wore the order of the garter round his leg, and a St. George gold chain, of the costliest character, pendant from his neck.

It might be imagined, that before such excessive splendour the poor foundling would have been somewhat abashed, and that her gentle nature would have sunk before the ardour of his gaze; but this was far from the case. The look, the manner, the appearance of the stranger, convinced her that he was no other than her princely lover, of whom she had heard so much; and the only sign she gave of his presence was rising from her seat the moment his nobility stood confessed. No royal queen could ever have received the homage of her courtiers with a truer majesty, than did the gentle Mabel stand before the enamoured glances of this magnificent noble.

"Nay, I beseech thee, do not stir!" murmured he, in a most passionate gallant manner, as he took her hand, and pressed it tenderly in his own. "I regret having disturbed such a miracle of loveliness, and yet I could not, had I strove even so, have refrained from expressing in some measure the intenseness of my admiration. Much as I had heard of thy marvellous beauty, and deeply as I had been impressed with the glimpse I had of it in the gardens of Kenilworth, I was totally unprepared for such ravishing perfections as I beheld when, unnoticed, I softly entered this chamber. He who held the apple when the three goddesses disclosed their rival graces to his admiring eyes, could have seen, in all their moving loveliness, nought half so worthy of pre-eminence as then met my wondering and most enamoured gaze."

"My lord, for such I believe you are styled," replied Mabel, with a simple courtesy that became her better than all art of compliment; "you are pleased to say this, as you have been pleased to shew me other signs of a like civilness in you; and for these, believe me, I am as truly grateful as ever heart was."

"O' my life, it delighteth me infinitely to hear thee express thyself so well disposed towards me," answered her companion, rapturously kissing of her fair hand. "But what I have done is nought to what the greatness of my love shall lead me to. But prythee tell me the happy subject of thy deep study."

"Indeed, it was no other than yourself, my lord," answered the poor foundling very readily.

"How proud am I of having so rare a student!" exclaimed the other, looking fondly in her face, and pressing her hands with a similar affectionateness. "How dost like the volume? wilt get it by heart?"

"In my then thinking, I was seeking the cause for my having been put by you in this place," answered Mabel.

"The cause, my sweet life!" cried the gallant, as if in some extreme astonishment; "why, what else cause can there be than thy most exquisite self? Look on those lustrous eyes, observe that delicate cheek, regard that eloquent and delicious mouth, or take the perfectness of those matchless features and peerless shape combined, and note if they contain not such prodigal cause of love as might warrant any such behaviour in a lover, as that I have been forced to take advantage of."

"Methinks, my lord, love might be better shewn," observed the gentle foundling.

"In some cases, doubtless," replied her companion; "but not where the lover is so circumstanced as am I. I have essayed in all manner of things thou shouldst meet such respect as true love delighteth to shew. Thy tiring is of the noblest, thy lodging the most sumptuous that could be had, and thy fare the delicatest that wealth and skill could unite in producing. Thou hast been waited on as became the guest of a prince; and so gallantly entertained as might be shewn to an enthroned queen!"

"Truly I have, and I thank you right heartily, my lord—yet——"

"Dost lack anything? Hast any desire? Has aught proper been forgotten?" continued the noble, with increasing earnestness.

"Indeed no, I have store of things of every sort,—but——"

"Dost not like the dwelling? thou shalt be removed to a palace," added her companion, without allowing her to finish her sentence. "Dost not approve of thy tiring, all Italy shall be searched for costlier stuffs? Hast fault to find with thy attendants, thou shalt have such honourable persons as thou canst not help approving of? Or is anything amiss with thy fare, the skilfulest cooks, and the daintiest cates shall be fetched from all parts of Christendom, to give thee better entertainment?"

"Truly there is no need," she replied; "methinks I should be wondrous discontent seemed I not satisfied with the bountiful great splendour with which I am surrounded; still there is one thing I would have you do, which surely you cannot avoid doing, if you have for me the exceeding love you have just expressed.

"Name it," said her companion, in an impassioned manner. "If it taketh up my whole fortune—which is considered to be in some excess—or requireth all my influence—which is said to be second to none in the kingdom—whatever thou dost require shall be done on the instant."

"Return me to my friends," answered Mabel.

"What!" exclaimed the gallant, evidently having expected from her something very different, "wouldst have me, ere I have scarce had an hour's acquaintance with so inestimable a treasure, to send it away where perchance I may never see it again."

"I doubt not you could see me at all proper times, with worthy Sir Thomas Lucy's permission," said the poor foundling.

"Believe me, my dear life, there is no possibility of such a thing, else should I have preferred doing so," observed her companion, with a famous earnestness. "There is such absolute reason for what has been done, as would convince any, were I allowed to say it; but at present I must needs be dumb on the matter. Give me but fair trial, and if, after some time, thou shouldst desire again to see thy friends, thou shalt go, and willingly."

"I thank you for that assurance, my lord," replied Mabel, somewhat comforted. "In very truth I am most anxious to return home, with as little tarrying as possible, and you will make me more bound to you, by helping me in my wish, than could you by detaining me, though you furnished my stay with the honourablest entertainment in your power."

"I beseech thee, my fair queen, move me not to it at this present," continued her noble gallant, very passionately. "Thou knowest not what great travail hath been mine for thy sweet sake, since I first had glimpse of thy enchanting graces. Allow me some solace after my so long trouble; believe me, night or day hath been one continual darkness with me, in which my hopes would appear like stars, in bright assurance the sunrise of my happiness was nigh at hand; and yet it came not, till my heart was nigh upon being weary with so much longing. Nought but the remembrance of those dazzling beauties, as they came upon me, like a sudden flash of heaven to a poor heathen, kept me in countenance with myself; for that remembrance brought with it such good warrant of gentle treatment, of excellent kind sympathy, and of generous sweet affection, as a nature well disposed to reward the infinite sufferings of unbounded love is ever possessed of. Let it not be I have rested on a broken reed."

"I should be loath to deal harshly with you, my lord," replied the simple foundling; "nor am I in any way so given towards any one. Yet I see not I could give you any relief stayed I here ever so."

"Be assured, sweetest, nothing is so easy," observed her companion, gazing on her as enamouredly as though he had put his whole heart and soul into a glance. "Let those entrancing eyes discourse with mine the true language they were made to express, till volumes of loving meaning beam in every look; twine those delicate arms around me as I would use mine own, till heart throb fondly against heart in natural unison, and every nerve throughout our enamoured natures thrill with the same soft ecstacy—and bring me hither those delicious lips that make the ruby pale, and look more tempting than the ripest ruddiest cherry, to refresh my thirsty soul with the precious, rapturous, exquisite sweet balm with which they are bedewed."

"Indeed, my lord, I ——"

"Behold me here, thy poor petitioner," continued the enamoured nobleman, kneeling on one knee at the feet of the gentle Mabel, with such a look and with such a manner few women could have resisted. "Note to how mean a strait my greatness is reduced—see the equal of princes, the very humblest of slaves. Dear, excellent fair creature! My whole being is bound up in the gaining of thy most choice affections. Shew me some sign—a smile, a word, a look—my case is not entirely desperate, and I would fill the air thou makest holy with thy presence, with my unceasing love and very earnest thankfulness."

Thus proceeded this accomplished gallant with the innocent gentle Mabel—now appealing to her sympathies,—now endeavouring to awaken her pride—a moment after striving with equal earnestness to excite her vanity, and anon straining every nerve to move her ambition: and thus he continued with the most passionate assiduity for several days, breathing into her ear the most delicate flattery, and exhausting every source of entertainment likely to dazzle or captivate an inexperienced tender woman. Save with her sympathies he scarce made any advance, which made him marvel infinitely, for he was the most irresistible lover that ever sought a fair lady's affections, and had achieved more triumphs over the sex than had any half dozen of his acquaintance. There was not a turn of their hearts with which he seemed not familiar, and he appeared to know the cunningest baits to draw up their desires. But this exceeding knowledge was derived from the court circles, or those who took after them in a manner, where such gifts as he possessed could scarce fail of having a most absolute influence. The mere fine ladies, or those eager to be thought so, readily gave way to his many fascinations, but the poor foundling was of a very different sort. There was in her nature a marvellous combination of simplicity and pride—the one kept her ignorant of the treachery of her companion—the other received his delusive attentions as though they were her just right and title. Something of this she had shewn when in company with Sir Valentine, when the modesty of her apparel seemed out of place with the air of graceful dignity and easy self-possession with which she shared in the court-like converse of the young knight;—but now, clothed in all the delicate splendour of the times, she listened to the dangerous homage of her princely gallant, with a manner so noble as must have convinced any spectator she took them more as proper respect than as matter for gratification.

Her noble lover's ecstacies availed him nothing—the fondness of his behaviour and discourse made as little impression—but his unceasing efforts to afford her, by the most lavish expenditure, signs of the unbounded estimation in which she was held by him, were accepted with gratitude; and the seeming terribleness of his sufferings when her behaviour put him into a despairing mood, were regarded with a natural sympathy. Here she was in some danger, for there is no such nigh relations to love as gratitude and pity.

In the meanwhile, William Shakspeare having at last met with Sir Valentine, instant proceedings were taken to endeavour to trace out the place to which the gentle Mabel had been carried. Nothing could exceed the manner in which the young knight was moved at the relation of his fair mistress's abduction. All the chivalry of his nature was up in arms in a moment, and he was for chasing the villains to the uttermost corners of the earth. With the feelings with which he had regarded her many moving graces, so that she had become to him the sovereign of his heart's wishes, he felt bound by every principle of knighthood to peril life and limb in her service, and mounting his palfrey he rode in every direction to find some traces of her flight. He was at last so fortunate as to meet with the man elsewhere spoken of, who had seen her borne past him, and had watched her direction, whilst he could keep her in sight; and with this intelligence he sat off as soon as he could from his kinsman's house, accompanied only by his favourite companion, the youthful Shakspeare, riding of a grey gelding, who was quite as eager as himself to go on such an errand.

The feelings of these two were as different as their different natures could make them. The young knight, in the fresh bloom of his manhood, saw beauty only as it was expected a soldier should see it—as something worthy of being honoured by the honourablest achievements. The young student, in the first soft glow of youth, saw beauty only as in such cases it might be seen of a student—as something to worship at a humble distance with the purest and noblest thoughts. The one believing it to be his duty, would have boldly proclaimed the name of Mabel as first in his esteem wherever he went,—the other feeling it to be his nature, would have thought it sacrilege to have mentioned her name in idle company, although his estimation of her was not a whit less than was that of his companion.

They proceeded on in the course directed, at all reasonable opportunities Sir Valentine entertaining of his young associate with a very gallant discourse concerning the doings of certain famous knights in love with notable fair ladies, and ever and anon seasoning it with divers pretty passages out of Petrarcha, his sonnets of love, to which the youthful poet would seriously incline his ear, get explained to him whatever he knew not the meaning of, and observe, question, and reply upon all he heard, with such sprightliness of wit and ingenuity of learning, as both astonished and delighted his fellow traveller.

They passed all manner of pleasant mansions, with excellent parks of deer, and beheld the country round shewing a thousand signs of the decay of summer, yet still possessing so much of greenness as gave it a seemly aspect. Occasionally, they would meet with a brave company going a hawking, each with a favourite bird on the wrist, and riding on an ambling palfrey, accompanied by attendants carrying of other hawks together, perched in a circle all hooded in their fairest gesses and Milan bells, ready to be cast off at a moment's notice. Anon, they would hear the loud "Soho!" of some eager huntsman, and they would rein in their steeds awhile to see the goodly sight of the hounds in full chase, and the gallant assemblage of men and horses speeding after them over hedge and ditch, hill and hollow, with some a tumbling in this place, others leaping in that, here a steed galloping without his rider, and there a rider running to catch his steed: and a little way further, they would come upon divers honest anglers, pursuing of their delicate sport by the sedgy margin of the brook, to the manifest catching of sundry luce, greyling, perch, bream, and dace, then uselessly flapping of their tails in the angler's basket.

The partridges hid their head among the stubble—the snipe lurked unseen in the water-courses—the wild-ducks floated in flocks over the broad ponds and marshy lakes, and the great heron lay in her haunt, amid the thick reeds of the same waters. On a branch of a withered old tree upon the banks, the gaudy kingfisher was making a choice repast, and in his hole deep in the sandy soil beneath, the greedy otter was busying himself with a like occupation. Great companies of small birds seemed pursuing of each other over the open fields, and far over head the noisy rooks gathered their black bands to ravage the distant country. As the travellers skirted a wood, they observed the nimble conies running into their holes, or a stray leveret rushing hither and thither, without knowing where, scared by the sound of the horses' feet. Presently, a young pigeon was noticed plying of her wings with the desperate eagerness of despair, as she left the wood for the open country; but a murderous hawk followed in her track, and as she sank panting with agony behind a tree, he swept down upon her swifter than the wind, and in the same minute fixed his sharp talons in her heart.

Having, from many of the labouring country-people, continued, as they proceeded, to gain such intelligence as still led them on, they had gone a famous distance, but full of ardour to accomplish their adventure, they pushed forward, regardless of all else, save the rescue of the gentle Mabel. It so happened, that at last, to their constant inquiries, nothing profitable was gained. No one had seen any such persons as were described to them. Finding this to be the case, they retraced their steps towards the place where they obtained the latest information, with the idea, that if any house lay convenient, it was probable there she had been carried. They now rode slowly, and took close scrutiny of the neighbourhood. After so doing for some time, they spied a fair house down in a hollow, almost hid up with trees, and completely surrounded with a high wall. Within less than a quarter of a mile of it was a small village, of some half-dozen houses, most distinguishable of which was the open smithy, the little inn, and a shop for the sale of all manner of things needed in such a place. It was thought advisable to make for this village at once, as being the likeliest spot to gain the necessary intelligence, and where they could get refreshments for themselves and beasts whilst they made their inquiries.

As they rode into the yard, William Shakspeare caught a glimpse of a man, in whose unpleasing features he immediately recognised the villain who had struck him when he seized his companion. The fellow saw not who had observed him, for he was busy playing at bowls under a shed with divers other persons. The youthful poet resolved on saying nothing of this discovery till a more fitting opportunity presented itself, therefore quietly followed the example of the young knight, in dismounting, giving his palfrey in charge to the landlord, and entering the inn. Upon sitting himself in a chamber to which he and Sir Valentine were shewn, he observed a decent sort of man, of a middle age, seated on a settle, with a book in his hand, and a jug of ale on the table before him. As William Shakspeare took himself to make a hearty meal of what was set before him, he gave another glance at the person with the book, and another after that, and he still thought, as he had imagined when he first came into the room, that the countenance was familiar to him. Sir Valentine, finding a stranger with them, was pondering with himself whether he should abstain from seeming curious, which might perchance defeat his object, or attempt cautiously to make the necessary inquiries of this very person. However, it so fell out, that the stranger raised his eyes from the book, on which he seemed as intent as though he were the most scholarly person that had ever lived, and thereupon encountered the somewhat earnest gaze of the youthful Shakspeare.

"Why, surely?" exclaimed the stranger, in a pleased surprise—"yes, it must be. O' my life, 'tis either Will Shakspeare or his ghost."

"'Tis myself, worthy Master Burbage," replied the young poet, proceeding quickly to take the proffered hand of the father of his friend and schoolfellow.

"Glad to see thee, by'r lady!" said the other, giving his young acquaintance a hearty shake of the hand.

"And how do thy excellent parents—and how is Dick, my son—and how are all my honest friends at Stratford?" The youthful Shakspeare quickly gave him the intelligence he required; Sir Valentine remaining silent, yet glad they were known to each other.

"But what hath brought you here, worthy Master Burbage?" inquired the young poet at last.

"Ey, what, indeed!" replied the player, somewhat dolefully. "'Sprecious! I would I had never come nigh the place. Methinks, I cannot help getting myself into a famous trouble on account of it, which may spoil my fortune ever after."

"Alack, that is woeful news!" observed William Shakspeare. "But, I pray you, tell me how that is so like to be?"

"Why, this is it," answered Master Burbage: "I have been sent down with my company to play stage plays and interludes for the entertainment of some ladies living in a house hard by."

"I pray you, tell me if the fellow in green, now playing at bowls, belongeth to that house?" inquired the young poet, very earnestly.

"Out of all doubt, he doth," replied the player. "He is the serving man of my Lady Arabella Comfit."

"The house hath an ancient look with it, and lieth hid among trees somewhat to the left of this?" observed his youthful friend; and at hearing this, Sir Valentine listened with a very singular curiousness.

"Ay, that is the place," said Master Burbage, a little impatiently. "Now, we have been ordered to get ourselves perfect in a new play by the next day after to-morrow at noon, to play before this noble lady and her friends, at her own house; and as we are all intent upon studying our parts, a certain boy of our company who playeth principal woman, hath the ill hap to be taken with a desperate illness; and we know not what to do on account of it, for we cannot play without him; and it is impossible for him to assist us in any manner, he is in so bad a state."

William Shakspeare mused on this intelligence for some minutes, then asked sundry questions concerning the part the sick boy was to have played, which Master Burbage shewed him by the book he had in his hand; and afterwards, both to the surprise of Sir Valentine and the other, offered, on condition Master Burbage should pass off himself and his companion as of his company, he would himself diligently essay the playing the part the sick boy ought to have played. Drowning men catch at straws; and just so eagerly did Master Burbage avail himself of this offer—promised what was required, and, moreover, offered to give the volunteer such instructions in the playing of the part as might be necessary for him to know. Upon the first opportunity, William Shakspeare told Sir Valentine his reasons for having done as he had; with the which the latter was so greatly satisfied, that he became a player on the sudden, with as much willingness as he would have entered a battle field.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Come, I'll be out of this ague,
For to live thus is not indeed to live;
It is a mockery and abuse of life;
I will not henceforth save myself by halves;
Lose all or nothing.

WEBSTER.

Paul. Thou shalt not go in liberty to thy grave,
For one night a sultana is my slave.
Mustapha. A terrible little tyranness.

MASSINGER.

But though this mayden tendre were of age,
Yet in the brest of hire virginitee
There was enclosed sad and ripe corage.

CHAUCER.

Then, my good girls, be more than woman, wise;
At least be more than I was; and be sure
You credit anything the light gives light to,
Before a man. Rather believe the sea
Weeps for the ruined merchant when he roars;
Rather the wind courts but the pregnant sails,
When the strong cordage cracks; rather the sun
Comes but to kiss the fruit in wealthy autumn
When all falls blasted.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

MASTER BURBAGE was delighted at a rehearsal at finding not only how well his young friend became his petticoats, but how truly and gracefully he enacted the different scenes in which he was to play. Certes, William Shakspeare was not a player for the first time, as witness his early playing of Gammer Gurton's Needle, and divers other interludes with his schoolfellows Green, Burbage, Hemings, and Condell; but he felt there was a monstrous difference betwixt doing of such things in the manner of school-boys, for their own amusement only, and attempting it in the fashion of real players for the entertainment of a gallant company. But by the aid of Master Burbage he got over much of the difficulty.

The play appeared cunningly writ with no other end than to lead to the undoing of the gentle Mabel. At least so thought Sir Valentine and his youthful friend; and it was agreed between them the young knight should play one of the minor characters in the which there was little to say or do, but it gave excellent opportunity of Sir Valentine's noting who were of the company, and if such person as they expected should be among them, it afforded a mean for her recognising him, and so knowing friends were near. This was done in case she should not know again the features of William Shakspeare, as he thought it possible she might not. There was another incident in the plot, but this the young player kept to himself.

The time arrived, and the players were ready. Master Burbage was encouraging his youthful companion with great store of praise, who, dressed in feminine apparel, was to personate a young country girl. In the first scene a noble lover appears, acquainting his confidant how he had seen such perfection in womanhood, as he must sigh his heart away for, was he not allowed her sweet society to ease his pain, whereupon in pity of his lord's dolorous moan, the other is made to offer to carry her off on the instant, to the which, seeing no other way of having her, the passionate lover gives his reluctant consent. Then followed an attempt to carry off the damsel, with her rescue by the interference of her friends. Here the young player came upon the stage, which was one end of a large chamber, the players coming in by a door at each side. At the other end he observed four persons sitting, but to his amazement they were all masked, as persons of quality often were. The first near him was a lady of a most graceful figure, dressed in as great magnificence as he had seen Queen Elizabeth at Kenilworth. The next was a gallant, in apparel equally gorgeous, who occasionally turned from the lady to speak to another gallant less nobly clad, sitting on the other side of him, and beyond him was another lady very richly garmented, but in no comparison with the first.

Whether the lady so bountifully attired was the fair creature of whom they were in search he had no means of knowing, for she gave no sign of recognition at his appearance. When Sir Valentine came on the stage she started somewhat, and asked some questions of her companion, and appeared to take greater interest in the play. Then was enacted her being carried off from her home, to the house of a kinswoman to the noble gallant's confidant. Here the country maid was seen clothed in the richest stuffs and jewels, and paid all manner of honourable attentions. At the sight of Sir Valentine, again the youthful lady gazed on him with more earnestness than she did before, and her interest in the play evidently grew deeper and deeper. After this the princely lover entered, and with the fondest rhetoric implored the love of the seeming Mabel, till he so moved her, as it appeared, she was content to promise him all manner of happiness, to his infinite contentation. To end all, there was to be a soliloquy to be spoken by the heroine, in which she was to applaud herself to the echo for her generousness in behalf of a gentleman who had shewn towards her such extreme honour, and vow to be his true love, and his alone ever after, till death should put asunder their mutual loving hearts.

This the players considered the difficultest passage of the whole, to be done with proper effect. As yet their new companion had conducted himself beyond their expectations; but this long soliloquy was a difficult part for the ablest; and fears were entertained he might lose himself in it, and so break down. To prevent this as much as possible, Master Burbage stationed himself at one of the open doors, so as not to be in sight of the audience, to prompt him in case he was at a loss. There was the fictitious Mabel, in all the splendour of her supposed greatness, and there stood the anxious prompter with book in hand, hoping with all his might the play would end as well as it had proceeded. The prompter gave the cue, but to his extreme astonishment the young player spoke words clean different. The prompter, in an agony of dread that all would be marred, gave out the cue again somewhat louder, but still the young player proceeded with a speech as opposite to that he ought to have said as two different things could be. Horror-struck, the poor player cast down his book, and began pulling of his hair, kicking the ground, and muttering imprecations against the author of his ruin, as he imagined the youthful Shakspeare to be, that all the players came marvelling to see what had produced such strange effects.

But if Master Burbage was so moved, not less so was the lady nighest to the stage. Her three companions were engaged in earnest converse, without paying the slightest attention to what was passing elsewhere. The intentness of the three to the subject of their converse, did not escape the notice of the young player; and though he suspected the fair deity of his dreams was the lady who paid such unceasing attention to the play, he essayed to have some certain knowledge of it by a device of his own. Therefore, instead of speaking the proper soliloquy, he spoke the following passage, which he had written to say in its place, if circumstances served:—

"Now with my heart let me hold conference.
This lord, he speaks me fair, he clothes me fine,
He entertains me honourably and well;
But how know I his purport in all this?
Is it in honesty, is it in respect?
Doth it mean well or ill, or good or bad?
His words are cups that brim all o'er with love,
But is there sign of wedding in this cheer?
Perchance the love he proffers comes to me
In some polluted vessel, that hath been
Lipped by dishonour'd maids in wantonness,
Or drain'd by thoughtless women in their shame?
These gaudy trappings, are they meant to be
The tire of marriage sent by honest love,
Or the more tawdry livery of guilt?
And all this splendour, all this bounteous state,
This worship, travail, reverence, and respect—
'Tis prodigal, 'tis admirable, 'tis rare,
Most choice, most noble, delicate, and sweet—
But doth it cover any meaner thing?
A thing so base, so vile, so infamous,
It doth require to be thus thickly gilt
To make the metal take a sterling shape?
I'll think of this."

The lady appeared somewhat agitated during the delivery of these passages, and leaned forward in her chair, drinking in every word, evidently with the most intense interest. The young player noticing these signs, and observing too that her companions were still paying no heed to him, proceeded with these words:—

"Alack, I cannot doubt
These words mean villany, these garments shame,
This entertainment mischiefs of the worst.
Methinks the very air I breathe, feels thick
With craft and malice, treachery and crime!

And I am here alone—far from all help—
Close watch'd, well guarded, providently kept.
But hush! there needs great caution. Not a word,
A sound, a gesture, dare I give to shew
I look suspiciously upon these schemes.
And yet there might be present even here
Friends who would strain their hearts for my escape
Shewed I some sign I would assay their aid.
At least I'll let them see I wear a face
That needs no mask—for I can truly swear
As yet it holds no intercourse with shame."

In an instant the mask was taken off the lady so deeply interested in the play, and, as the youthful Shakspeare had for some minutes anticipated, he beheld the guileless beautiful countenance of the gentle Mabel, flushed with excitement, and gazing upon him with so imploring anxious a look, it was plain she had felt every word he had uttered. The face was again masked, quite unobserved by her companions. The young player made a sign of recognition, and concluded with these lines:—

"These friends I'll trust. I know they may be found
Out by the gate that ends the garden wall.
There will I seek them with what speed I may;
Having assurance, by their means, to 'scape
The living hell that holds me round about;
And back return to innocence and peace,
An honour'd dwelling, and a spotless name."

"Come, sweetest, the play is ended," whispered her noble gallant. Mabel mechanically rose, and accompanied him to her own chamber. Her feelings were in such a state of tumult she dared not speak. She repeated to herself the lines—

"I know they may be found
Out by the gate that ends the garden wall,"

as if she would impress them so firmly on her memory there could be no chance of her forgetting them: she also remembered the hint that had been given her to be cautious, but she had been so little accustomed to disguise, that here she somewhat feared for herself. The revulsion of feeling had been so deep, so strong, and so sudden, from a sense of security and gratitude to a sense of disgust and abhorrence, that it left her for some minutes so greatly bewildered, she scarce knew what she was about. Presently her lover and herself unmasked. The signs of a disturbed nature so visible in her, he seemed to expect as a natural consequence of his craftily devised play, and he had not the slightest doubt it had produced all the effect he had desired. It was time now, he thought, to follow up his advantage before the simple girl could have opportunity for reflection, and he made himself ready, with the desperate earnestness of a determined profligate, to conclude the plot against her, as it had been settled by his companions in iniquity, during the delivery of the concluding soliloquy. He came close to her, and wound his arm fondly round her waist, as she was endeavouring to put her disordered thoughts into something resembling purpose, bringing his face as near to hers as he might, and gazing into her eyes with the most fond and passionate glances.

"My sweet life," murmured he, in such soft thrilling tones as he fancied would be most effective, "we dally with opportunity. The happiness I have so long coveted, and so thouroughly strove to deserve, should now, methinks, be my just reward. Love beckons us to mutual bliss. Hither with me awhile, upon those balmy lips to breathe new life, and taste such joy as the enamoured soul alone can know. Prythee, come this way, my heart!—my queen!—my treasure!" The gentle Mabel allowed herself to be borne unresistingly towards the next chamber, seemingly as if stupified by the fascinating gaze of her licentious companion, who hung over her exquisite countenance as he drew her along like a gloating serpent; but the noble pride of her nature at last made itself manifest, for as she came near the door, on a sudden she burst from his hold, and retreating back a pace or two, fixed on him a look of such utter scorn as would have crushed a meaner wretch to the earth.

"Thou shameless villain!" exclaimed she, her voice half choked with the fulness of her emotions. "Thou pitiful traitor to all true love and honesty! Dost call this nobleness? Dost style this honour? How darest thou attempt to pass off such baseness for the behaviour of a princely person?"

"Why, how now?" cried the gallant, in real astonishment. "What meaneth this unworthy language, and these terrible indignant looks."

"What mean they?" replied the poor foundling, her lustrous eyes flashing with scorn, and her whole countenance, as he had justly observed, looking terribly indignant. "They mean that thou hast been hugely mistaken in me, as hitherto have I been in thee. I am not of such worthless stuff as thou hast supposed. I did believe thee all thou didst assume, and therefore felt no fear. Thou didst seem honourable. I thought thee so."

"Prythee, let us have no more of this," observed the gallant, impatiently. "I marvel thou shouldst get into so famous a passion about nothing, after having enjoyed at my expense such bounteous entertainment."

"I needed it not—I asked it not," answered Mabel. "It was forced on me under colour of honourable intents; but now I know the baseness of its ends,—I will not be a partaker of it another minute of my life."

"Not so fast, my pretty tyrantess!" exclaimed her companion. "I cannot part with thee so soon, or lessen the splendour of which thou hast so liberally partaken. Nor can I believe thou wouldst play so ill a part as this thou art about. Come, come, sweetest! this humour becomes thee not all."

"Away, I am not to be beguiled!" cried the fair foundling, eluding his approaches.

"Nay, 'tis too hard a thing—I cannot think of it," replied the other, standing before the door she sought to make her exit out of.

"I must not see my full great pains and cost all come to nought—'tis out of justice, and against all right. Marry, wouldst take thy pleasure and not pay the price?"

"I tell thee once again, I took it, thinking it was honourably given," said Mabel. "Thou didst not mention price, thou talkedst of honour! Didst think that I would barter away my own respect to lie in costly lodging, and be clothed in delicate attire? Take back thy pitiful bribes," continued she, as she tore from her person her jewels, her chains of gold, and sparkling rings, and dashed them at his feet. "I loathe all I have had of thee—I loathe still more the villain who could put them to so base a purpose."

"Ha, dost, indeed!" exclaimed her gallant, his face now assuming some anger. "O' my life, I will not be so easily thrust aside. I have done what ought to satisfy any reasonable woman. Indeed, I have had more cost and pains taken with thee than with any half dozen others I have fancied; but if fair words will not do with thee foul deeds shall. Thou art so completely in my power that resistness is useless. 'Tis vain struggling. Thou must needs submit."

"Oh, I beseech thee, have some pity!" cried the poor foundling, falling on her knees at his feet with a look so moving, the savagest beast must have been tamed at the sight of it. "Surely, thou meanest not such evil as thou speakest: I cannot think so ill of thee. Thou art, indeed, that princely person I once thought, and knowest and feelest in thy inmost heart, it is no part of nobleness to wrong a poor maid. Let me go in honour from thy house, I'll pray for thee all my days. I'll hold thee ever after a true good friend—a bountiful sweet lord, the very noblest gentleman that breathes. My lord—my worthy lord—my honourable good lord—as God shall pity thee, so pity my poor state!"

She might have implored a stone. The licentious noble, with his looks burning with his dishonest passions, drew her in his arms towards the adjoining chamber, though she clung to his limbs with desperate grasp, and continued with straining eyeballs and hoarse-thick voice, to pray his mercy. As he held her before him, her hands, clutching him wildly as she was borne along, at one time fell upon the jewelled pommel of his dagger. In a moment the blade was out of its sheath—in the next she had twisted herself free of his grasp, and stood at some distance from him, with one hand striving to stay the throbbing of her heart, and the other holding out the weapon threateningly before her. The beauty of her countenance was now absolutely sublime. There was in it a lofty grandeur of expression that can scarce be conceived. Her eyes seemed fountains of living lightning, and her beautiful lips appeared to curl with an unutterable sense of outraged majesty no language can give the remotest idea of.

"Touch me at thy peril!" exclaimed she, as audible as her perturbed state would allow. Her companion seemed so completely taken by astonishment, that for a moment he stared at her as if uncertain what to be about. At last he made a movement as if he would approach her, and on the instant, her left arm was pointed towards him as stiffly as though it had been iron, whilst her right clutched the dagger a little behind her. She elevated herself to her full height, and threw her head somewhat back, with a look and a manner that shewed a stern determination.

"I warn thee!" muttered the poor foundling, in a terrible earnestness; "if thou dost but come within arm's length of me to follow up thy villanous intentions, as Jesu shall save my soul, I'll cleave thy heart in twain!"

The profligate drew back. He dared not battle with the fierce storm he had raised; so, saying he would soon send to her those who would have her out of her tragedy humour, he turned on his heel, to seek the assistance of his vile associates. Mabel, in the same attitude, and with the same look, followed him step by step to the door. When she heard his departing foot, she looked to the fastenings, there were none inside the chamber—she dropped her dagger, and clasped her hands in despair. On a sudden a thought struck her. She ran to the casement and threw it open. It looked into the garden, above which it stood some ten feet. Without a moment's hesitation she leaped out, and finding herself safe when she came to the ground, flew down the garden like an escaped bird. Keeping the wall in view, she came, out of breath, to a door at its extremity. It was partly open. She dashed through it, staggered forward, and fell, with a wild hysterical laugh, into the ready arms of Sir Valentine.

CHAPTER XIX.

Forth goeth all the court both most and lest
To fetch the floures fresh, and braunch and blome—
And namely hauthorn brought both page and grome
And than rejoysen in their great delite:
Eke ech at other throw the floures bright,
The primerose, the violete, and the gold,
With fresh garlants party blew and white.
CHAUCER.

There's not a budding boy or girl, this day
But is got up, and gone to bring in May.
A deale of youth, ere this, is come
Back, and with white-thorn laden home.
HERRICK.

In this our spacious isle I think there is not one
But he hath heard some talk of him and eke of Little John,
Of Tuck the merry friar, which many a sermon made
In praise of Robin Hood, his outlaws, and their trade,
And of his mistress dear, his loved Marian.
DRAYTON.

Shall the hobby horse be forgot then?
The hopeful hobby horse, shall he be foundered?
BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

THE feeling with which the youthful poet regarded the fair object of his recent adventure, if it could be called love, was very different from the passion which goeth under that name. In fact, it was more a sentiment than a passion—rather the offspring of the intellect than of the affections. It was the first rosy hues of light which ushereth in the sunshine of the soul, producing the fairest glimpses of heaven, before the atmosphere hath heat enough to warm the blood. Love it was, beyond all doubt, but it was that peculiar species which is found only to visit the very young and very imaginative. It is true it hath a natural source, but it is equally undeniable, it dwelleth in the fairy regions of the ideal. Where there is early sign of great intellect, there will also be found a like early sign of deep feeling. The one is supported by the other, fostered, encouraged, and fed by it. Beauty is indeed the air it breathes, but imagination is the soil from which it draws its nourishment. The boy genius is ever the boy lover, and having found some gentle being worthy to be enshrined in the sanctuary of his hopes, he proceeds not only to invest her image with all loveable attributes, but with such loveable behaviour as seemeth most proper for the entertainment of his fantasy.

He finds a spirit rising over his thoughts, which gives them a sort of softened halo, that at some favourable opportunity taketh the shape of song or sonnet delicately fashioned—a sensible adoration—an inspiration beginning and ending in a spiritual heaven of its own. Ideas take to themselves wings, and fly east and west, and north and south, bringing back the riches, rarities, and perfections of the whole globe with which to deck this favoured deity. He ransacks the deepest hollows of the sea—he snatches glory from the shining stars—he makes the enamelled earth show all her bravest tapestry that he may choose the daintiest piece of all—and far above, beneath, around, and about, where splendour shines, or modest beauty hides, he bears away their gifts, as offerings worthiest of so pure a shrine.

Truly, as hath just been said, this is the love of the cool morning of life, that differeth as much in its nature from the blushing sunrise of youth, as from the noon-tide heats of manhood; and like unto that early season of the day, it soon glides into a warmer atmosphere. Love, such as this, will always be found to have no purpose, save the deification of its object, which it loves to worship, rather than worships to love. This way it goeth on, like the silk-worm in its cocoon, only known by the pleasing mantle it weaves around itself; and having at last spent all its energies, it comes forth, some brief space after its labours, as different in character and appearance as any two things can be.

This love, though, let it be remembered, made William Shakspeare a poet, some sign of which, albeit, it must be thought of all judges, one of no particular greatness, may be seen in the simple ballad found by the antiquary in the book of songs, which did so much delight the good old knight and his companions; but it should also be borne in mind, such are ever first efforts. The materials of poetry may lie in prodigal heaps within the brain, but the fashioning them into the properest shape comes but after many trials. The soliloquy the young poet spoke in the place of the one intended to end the play, deserveth praise only for the readiness with which it was written, and aptness for the occasion which wrought it into existence. It cannot be expected the finish of an experienced writer, or the sufficiency of a mature genius should be found in such things. They should be taken merely for what they appear. Nevertheless, if it be thought the poet was but in his pot-hooks, I doubt not in good time to shew such craft of penmanship in him, as shall be all men's admiration unto the end of time.

Still was he as diligent a student as ever; and never could scholar have more careful teachers than William Shakspeare had in Master Peregrine, the antiquary, and Sir Johan, the chaplain. Ever since the affair of the ballad, each of these two watched till they could find the young student alone, and then they would strive as never they strove before he should profit by their instructions, in the full belief all the whilst, that from *his* teaching alone, the youth had gained all the knowledge he possessed. By their means he obtained such an acquaintance with what was worthiest of note in ancient English literature, and Greek and Latin classic lore, as it was scarce possible he could have obtained by any other means. But about this time he began more to observe than he had hitherto done. He made comparisons—he judged—he looked into the meanings of things,—he commenced studying the application of words, and he analysed and weighed, and sifted what he read, and what he saw, till he could point out where lay the good and where the bad—how they might be distinguished, and what was the difference between any two particular matters that looked to be alike. This study was not confined to books: he pursued it wherever he went, and found no lack of subjects in the common phenomena of nature. Even a drop of rain was some object for speculation—the shooting of a star, the fructification of a plant, and the falling of a leaf seemed as worthy of inquiry. A storm never rolled over him but the lightning flashed some new meaning into his mind—and he never witnessed the rising of the sun, but with it came some fresh light into his thoughts. As he saw the emmets crowding to and fro among the grass, he would say, "Wherefore is this?" and whilst he watched the builders of the grove making their delicate dwellings in the forked branches of the tree, he would exclaim, "How is this done?" High or low he sent his curious mind seeking intelligence. Nothing escaped him, and to his eager questionings, all things in nature gave him ready answers.

The gentle Mabel he saw not again all this time. He frequented her favourite haunts, but she was no where visible. Day after day found him stealing among the trees where he had so oft watched her graceful progress, but his anxious gaze was never blessed with the slightest sign of her presence. He changed the time. He took the early morning by the hand, and roamed the park before the hind had left his bed of rushes; but though nature rose woongly to meet his glance, he looked upon her graces only as a sort of faint cold picturing of those he desired to meet in all their living freshness in a much fairer original. He made himself familiar with the noon, and still did nature court him with her lovingest looks, and still did she receive such attentions as proved she was merely regarded as the ambassador of the fair sovereign of his thoughts. And he lingered out the hours with twilight, till she was lost in the embraces of the shadowy eve, but with no other result than had accompanied his earlier seeking. Thus passed the winter, till the frost was gone, the hearth-side tales forgotten, the Christmas sports but faintly remembered, and every thing around was full of green promise and blooming expectation.

The chief companions of his own age had long been the four schoolfellows before described—of whom Tom Greene was such a compound of oddness and drollery, as was not to be met with elsewhere. None like him could play the Hobby-horse in Friar Tuck, or the Fool in the May Games, or the Lord of Misrule in a Twelfth night revel, or the Vice of a Moral Play. At Plough Monday none was so much in request, and not less so was he at Candlemas eve, or Shrovetide, or Hocktide, or at Whitsun-ales, at a sheep-shearing, or a harvest home. Dick Burbage was more for the playing of ingenious tricks, which he carried off with such a careless happy impudence, that its pleasantry often took away all offence. Hemings had none of this humour, though he could enjoy it in others, yet when he joined his companions, he choose to play a courtly part, if such could be had. As for Condell he was ready enough to do whatever the others did. He would play with them at shuffle-board or shove-groat, in a mumming or an interlude, as eagerly as he would join them in running at the quintain, or assist them in the threshing of a shrove-tide hen. In fact he seemed to care not what it was, so he was one of the party, but if he might be allowed a preference he would gladly stand out for the playing of Gammer Gurton's needle.

During the time his thoughts were so busy feeding of his fantasy for the fair maid of Charlcote, William Shakspeare had joined his companions but seldom. In very truth he somewhat shrunk from their boisterous mirth, for he liked best to be alone; but seeing nought of Mabel, his mind, for want of that necessary nourishment, relaxed something in the earnestness of its worship. At such an age and with such a nature this ideal idolatry requireth at least the frequent presence of the object, before it can take upon itself that warmer devotion which alone is lasting and natural; and without sight of the idol, the mere imaginative existence of this boyish love soon becomes manifest. Gradually the thoughts relax in their searching after admirable things with which to tire their gentle deity. They go not so far—they stay not so long—they bring home less and less every day; and thus it goeth on, the circuit of their visits lessening by degrees, and their labour becoming correspondingly unprofitable, till at last they cease altogether going out on any such errands. Now it may be considered the idolatry is at an end, though some faint vestige of it may linger about the mind; but it is a bygone superstition belonging to an ideal world, that will only be remembered by some beautiful presence in nature with which it was wont to be accompanied, as some will still believe they see the dryad in the tree and the nymph in the fountain. This was the time for entertaining that deeper worship to which allusion has just been made, and the young poet was not long without meeting with a suitable deity willing to excite and to receive it.

Hemings' friends lived at Shottery, a village at a little distance from Stratford, to which William Shakspeare and others of his companions occasionally resorted, and one pleasant afternoon, as the young poet was returning from a visit he had been paying to his schoolfellow, he was aroused from his customary meditations when alone by a sweet voice singing these words:—

THE SPINSTER'S SONG.

"Damon came a praising me,
Vowing that he loved me too—
None like I so fair could be,
None like him could be so true.
I meant to chide, but spoke no sound—
And still my wheel went round and round.

"Damon, somewhat bolder grown,
In his hand mine fondly placed,
Press'd it gently in his own,
Then his arm twin'd round my waist.
Somehow I smil'd instead of frown'd,
And still my wheel went round and round.

" Damon brought his face nigh mine,
Though he knows I kisses hate;
I would baulk his base design—
But, the wretch, he did it straight!
And then again!—and still I found
That still my wheel went round and round.

During the singing of these verses the young poet was engaged in observing the singer. At a little distance from the road, running between Shottery and Stratford, was a neat cottage, trailed all over with a goodly pear tree, then in full blossom, with a grass plat before it. It was not one of the common sort of cottages, for it possessed an appearance of comfort and respectability which shewed it belonged to some person at least of the rank of a yeoman. There was in one place a famous brood of poultry, and in another a good fat sow, with a litter of pigs, wandering about at their will. A fair garden and orchard stood beyond the house, and in a neat paddock at the side were a cow and a favourite poney. At the open door, through which might be seen notable signs of the solid comfort that prevailed within, some two or three very young children were taking of their supper of porridge in wooden bowls, occasionally throwing a spoonful to the fowls, to the monstrous gratification of both parties; whilst farther off a boy, of some eight or ten years, was sitting on a stool, amusing himself with a tame rabbit. The singer, however, was none of these. At a spinning wheel, placed close to the house, at a few yards from the door, there sat a blooming girl, attired with that sort of daintiness with which such fair creatures do love to set off their comeliness. She was the singer. There was a laughing careless air with her as she sung the words, that, in the eyes of the spectator, much heightened the provocation of her pouting lips, and large, soft, languishing eyes, her rich dark complexion, and the budding fulness of her figure.

William Shakspeare had crept unseen behind a large walnut tree that stood in front of the cottage, where he stood like one spell-bound, drinking in at his eyes such intoxicating draughts of beauty, that they put him into a steep forgetfulness of all other matters in a presently; and here doubtless he would have stood, I know not how long, had not the singer made some sign she was aware of his vicinity—perchance she knew it all the time—however, spying of a handsome youth gazing on her in a manner she could not misinterpret, she rose from her seat in a seeming great surprise, and as she did so the young poet, in voluntary homage to the power he was so well inclined to honour, uncovered his head. There they stood, noticing of nothing but each other, and neither saying a word. All at once the little children dropped their bowls, and with infantine exclamations of delight ran as fast as they could to a tall, honest-looking, manly sort of man, who with a keg slung across his shoulders, and in a working dress, seemed as if he had just come from his labour in the fields. The young poet turned and beheld this person close behind him, with the children clinging to his legs with every appearance of exquisite sweet pleasure.

"Hallo, young sir! what dost want?" inquired he, eyeing the youthful Shakspeare with some curiousness.

"Truly, I want nothing," replied the latter, a little taken by surprise, as it were; "I was but attracted here by some sweet singing, and did not imagine I was doing of any wrong by listening."

"Humph!" exclaimed the elder, perfectly conscious that this was the truth: for he, having been behind the youth from the first, had witnessed the whole affair. "What's thy name?" added he.

"William Shakspeare," was the answer.

"Thought so,—give 's thee hand," said the other frankly, and in the next moment the young poet found his palm grasped by his new acquaintance with a friendliness that quite astonished him. "Thy father and I are old friends from boys. Ask of him if he know not John Hathaway. Many a time hath he been in my house, and as oft have I been in his; and famous sport have we had together, I'll warrant. But somehow I have seen nought of him of late. As for thyself, I have heard very creditable report of thee, and therefore say, with all heartiness, I am glad to see thee here—so thou must needs come in, and take a bit of supper with us."

William Shakspeare was in no mood for refusing of such a request; he accepted the invitation as freely as it was given, and both entered the cottage together. There the rack filled with bacon—the logs blazing comfortably in the deep chimney, with the gun hanging above, and the store of platters, bowls, trenchers, and other household things that surrounded him on every side, were most convincing proofs to the visitor that the owner lived in no sort of want.

"Here, Anne, take these things, and draw us a jug of ale," cried John Hathaway, putting down on the table what he had carried on his shoulder, as the singer hastened towards him, and would have a kiss of him with the rest—a proceeding, by the way, which his guest regarded with something of envy. "Then put these young ones to their beds, and afterwards cut us a delicate rasher, with such other things as thou hast for eating; for here is the son of an honest friend of mine who meaneth to sup with us."

"You shall have a most dainty supper anon, father," replied his daughter, busying herself without delay to do as she was required. In the meanwhile the youthful Shakspeare was making friends with the children, and by the kind affectionateness of his manner quickly won their little hearts.

"Come, draw up thy chair, friend Will, and take a drink," said his host, seating himself in the chimney corner, where there were seats on each side. William Shakspeare did as he was bid, nothing loath, and presently the two fell in conversing about ordinary matters, and from these to other topics of more interest. The young visitor appeared desirous of making a favourable impression upon his host, for he endeavoured to make all his talk turn upon what the other was most familiar with, and spoke so learnedly upon the state of the crops, the best systems of tillage, the prospects of the lambing season, and the breed of live stock, that he not only won the honest yeoman's heart, but he astonished him monstrously into the bargain. All the whilst he failed not to give an occasional admiring glance at the movements of his new friend's buxom daughter, who for her part seemed to give back his looks with some interest.

"How dost like our Anne's singing?" inquired John Hathaway, when his daughter had left the chamber to put the children to their beds.

"Very exceedingly, I do assure you," replied the youth, with a notable sincerity.

"Humph!" exclaimed the father, as though he were a thinking of something he cared not to give speech to. "Indeed she hath a sweet throat." Nothing more was said on that head at that moment; and they again talked of country matters, till his host could not any longer contain his great wondering at his guest's marvellous insight into such things, and inquired how he acquired it; whereupon the other truly answered he got it by questioning of those whose business it was. In good time the yeoman's blooming daughter returned, and busied herself with preparations for supper, taking care whenever she could to have a share in the discourse, which she did with a pretty sprightliness exceedingly agreeable to her young admirer. Seeing her attempting to move the great table nigher the fire, he must needs jump up, and with a graceful officiousness, seek to do it himself, the which she appeared to object to in some manner, and there was a little arguing of the matter betwixt them—the father looking on with a glimmering smile, as if he could see in it something exceeding pleasant. The end was, that the two young people carried the table together, manifestly to their extreme satisfaction.

This John Hathaway was one of the most industrious yeomen in the country, and had been some time a widower. He was of a famous pleasant temper, but was far from making a boisterous shew of it. He delighted greatly to assist in the honest pleasures of any other, yet few could guess from his manner on such occasions, that he took the interest in it he did. Indeed, he was somewhat of a sly humour, and liked none to know when he was most pleased. His honest well-embrowned countenance, set off with hair and beard, getting to be grey, never ventured on such occasions beyond a lurking smile, and even that he seemed to take care the parties who had excited it, should not see. Doubtless he was in a rare humour with his new acquaintance, but though he lacked nothing in hospitality, he appeared to hear him and regard him with so staid an aspect, it was difficult for the latter to know whether he was satisfied with him or otherwise. Still the youth continued seeking to entertain his host with his converse, having sufficient reward in the approving glances of the other's sprightly daughter, who was well enough acquainted with such things to take a singular pleasure in observing the skill with which her young admirer spoke of them.

In due time the rashers were done, and with a store of other wholesome victual, were put on a fair white cloth, that covered the table, and William Shakspeare was pressed with blunt courtesy by the father, and a more winning persuasiveness by the daughter, to partake of the fare set before him. This he essayed to do with a notable good will. After this the blooming Anne brewed a goodly posset, and whilst they were enjoying it, her father called on her to sing him a song, the which she seemed a little,—a very little, to hesitate upon, with a sort of pretty coyness time out of mind customary under similar circumstances; but after the handsome youth had pressed her with an excellent show of rhetorick, she sung a dainty ditty, then popular, concerning of "The little pretty Nightingale," and at least one of the listeners thought it most exquisite sweet singing. Then John Hathaway would needs have a song of his guest, to the which his daughter added her entreaties so prettily, the youthful Shakspeare found it impossible to resist, whereupon he commenced the singing of a favourite love-song of the time, beginning "If I hade wytt for to endyte." The words were of a pleasant conceit, which gained considerably in admirableness by the manner of his singing, and the tune, by means of his rich clear voice, came upon the air a very river of melody. Whether the yeoman liked the song could only be told by the pleasure lurking in the corners of his mouth, and shining quaintly in his half-closed eye-lids, which might be interpreted he saw more in it than the singer imagined—however, that his daughter relished it there could be no questioning, for her smiles were full as evident as her praises.

"Now, friend Will, thee must be agoing," exclaimed John Hathaway at last, in his usual plain countryman sort of manner. "'Tis my custom to go to bed with the lamb, and rise with the lark—an excellent good custom I'll warrant—so I'll e'en bid thee a fair good night—nevertheless I will add to it I shall be happy to see thee at all times—and if I be not at home, perchance Anne will be as happy to see thee as myself." He said this with a look of humour that shone through all the staidness of his aspect, and shaking his visitor heartily by the hand, he opened the door for his exit. His daughter denied not a word of what her father had said. Indeed, her glances, as she bade the youth good night, as plainly said—"Come again," as ever was expressed by a pair of bright eyes since the world began.

William Shakspeare returned home with his feelings in a sort of delicious pleasure, perfectly new to him. Be sure he would have hastened to the cottage next day, only he was forced to be at Sir Marmaduke's according to promise. The old knight took huge delight in having all festivals and holidays kept with due ceremony at his mansion. He would not have omitted the slightest things that savoured of the old times. Knowing this, the antiquary called his young scholar to his counsels, for the express purpose of getting up the festival of the May in such a manner as should outdo all former things of the like sort, and the youth had been commissioned to press into his service whoever he thought could afford him proper assistance. These he had to make familiar with their duties. But if he did not visit the fair singer that day, be sure he did the day following, invested with extraordinary powers by his friend Master Peregrine, with which he acquainted his new acquaintance John Hathaway, and to his exceeding satisfaction found they were favourably entertained of him:—the purport of which will be seen anon.

Scarce had the last day of April closed, when, by the sweet moonlight, William Shakspeare, with a famous company of both sexes—friends, tenants, servants, and others—started to a neighbouring wood, where they searched about for all manner of flowers then in season, which they gathered into nosegays and garlands; and broke down blossoming boughs of trees, chiefly of birch, green sycamore, and hawthorn, to carry home with them to deck the doors and porches withal, and make a goodly maypole. Famous sport had they all the while, laughing and shouting, frolicking in the grass, and wandering about dispersedly, making the whole country ring with their mirth. About sunrise they again joined company—men, women, and children—each laden with the spoil of the Spring. A tall elm had been cut down, and a straight and taper pole fitted to the end of it, and painted in spiral lines of yellow and black. It was then prodigally adorned with garlands of fresh flowers and new ribbon of the gayest colours. Some forty yoke of oxen belonging to Sir Marmaduke, with each a sweet posey at the tip of his horns, had then to draw it home, accompanied on its slow march with the whole of the company, bearing their green boughs, savoury herbs, and odorous blossoms,—singing, leaping, and dancing, as if nothing could exceed their pleasure.

The maypole having been drawn to an open place in the park, convenient to the house, was raised up on high with a great shouting and glee; and it was a right dainty sight to note the streamers dancing merrily in the breeze, and the various colours of the delicate blossoms. Having done this, the principals of the festival had other preparations to make, which they set about with a proper earnestness. All the armour in the old hall was presently hid under boughs and flowers, and the like decorations were prodigally bestowed in every direction about the house. On the floor the long tables were spread with cakes and cream, and other choice cates for whoever chose to come. The whole neighbourhood looked like a fairy bower, and crowds of persons in strange garments came thronging in and out, looking as joyful as ever they had been in their days.

After this, wholesome viands, and ale of the best, might be had in different bowers made of branches of trees in the park; and at dinner there was a most prodigal banquet of everything for to eat and to drink that could be procured. Here was a gammon of bacon-pie, there a lamb dressed whole—in one place a venison pasty, in another a great fish, a shield of brawn with mustard, a chine of beef roasted, baked chewets, a kid with a pudding in the belly, and all manner of poultry, made but a small stock of the wonderful load of victual under which the table groaned. Even the lower messes had most handsome entertainment, and every place bore sign of most sumptuous feasting. The great variety of dresses then worn, and the happy joyous faces there visible, made the whole scene as pleasant a one as could be imagined; but the goodliest feature of it all was old Sir Marmaduke in his customary place at the top of the table, regarding every one with the same graciousness, and only looking around him to see that all present were as happy as he thought they ought to be. Of the jests that flew about, or of the tricks that were played, I can make scarce any mention. The strangeness, however, of some groups, methinks should not escape notice:—for in one place St. George and the dragon, forgetful of their deadly enmity, were shaking hands introductory to drinking each other's health; in another, Robin Hood and little John, as regardless of their mutual love, were seeking which could lay fastest hold of a tankard each had got a hand upon; here the fool was cunningly emptying of Friar Tuck's full trencher into his own empty one, whilst the other was turning a moment on one side in amorous gossip with his acquaintance, maid Marian; and then the hobby-horse was knocking together the heads of Will Stukely and Much, the miller's son, who were leaning over each other, laughingly regarding the proceedings of their friend in motley.

After this, by the great exertions of young Shakspeare, this goodly company returned to the park in the following order:—first, went one playing on the bag-pipes, and another on the tabor, making as much noise as they could; then followed the Morris-dancers, with their faces blackened, their coats of white spangled fustian, with scarfs, ribbons, and laces flying from every part, holding rich handkerchiefs in their hands, and wearing purses at their girdles, garters to their knees, with some thirty or forty little bells attached to them, and feathers at their hats, with other bells at their wrists and elbows. They danced as they went, and flaunted their handkerchiefs very bravely. Then came six comely damsels, dressed in blue kirtles, and wearing garlands of primroses. After them, as many foresters in tunics, hoods, and hose, all of grass green, and each of them with a bugle at his side, a sheaf of arrows at his girdle, and a bent bow in his hand.

After them walked William Shakspeare, equipped as Robin Hood, in a bright grass green tunic, fringed with gold; his hood and hose parti-coloured blue and white; his handsome head was crowned with a garland of rose-buds; he bore a bow in his hand, a sheaf of arrows in his girdle, and a bugle-horn suspended from a baldrick of light blue tarantine, embroidered with silver, worn from his shoulder. A handsome sword and dagger formed also part of his equipments. On one side of him walked Hemings, as Little John; on the other Condell, as Will Stukely; and divers others of the merry outlaw's companions followed, two by two, all in their suits of green, and each with a sheaf of arrows at his girdle, and a bent bow in his hand. Then came two fair damsels, in orange coloured kirtles, with white court-pies or vests, preceding Anne Hathaway, as Maid Marian, attired in a watchet-coloured tunic reaching to the ground, with a white linen rochet, with loose sleeves fringed with silver, and neatly plaited, worn over it, her girdle of silver baudeken fastened with a double row on the left side; her long silken hair, divided in many ringlets, flowed down upon her fair shoulders; the top of her head ornamented with a net-work caul of gold with a garland of silver, decked with fresh blue violets above: truly as tempting a Maid Marian as ever seduced outlaw to the merry green wood. After her came a company of her maidens; some in sky-coloured rochets girt with crimson girdles, with garlands of blue and white violets; and others, with green court-pies, with garlands of violets and cowslips.

Then came Sir Marmaduke's fat butler, as Friar Tuck, carrying a huge quarter staff on his shoulder; and with him Oliver Dumps, the constable, as Much, the miller's son, bearing a long pole with an inflated bladder attached to one end of it. Who should come next but Tom Greene, as the hobby-horse, frisking up and down, galloping, curvetting, ambling, and trotting after so moving a style, it naturally forced a horse-laugh from a great portion of the spectators. It should be remembered, that this ancient feature in a May-day festival, was a horse of pasteboard, having false legs for the rider outside, whilst the real legs stood on the ground, concealed from the spectators by the saddle-cloth which enveloped the hobby-horse all around; and great art was required to make a proper exhibition of horsemanship, by the person appearing to be its rider. Then came our old acquaintance Humphrey, in the form of a dragon,—hissing, yelling, and shaking his wings in a most horrid manner; and after him Dick Burbage, as St. George, in full armour, ever and anon giving his enemy a poke behind, with his wooden spear, that made him roar again. Following these were a motley assemblage of villagers and guests, and Sir Marmaduke, with his chaplain, in the midst.

When they came to that open part of the park before described, the sports recommenced with the spirit they had not known all the day before. The foresters shot at the target, and Robin and his Maid Marian were of course the chiefest of all for skill. Some danced round the maypole; but the dragon, who had drank more of the knight's good ale than became any dragon of gentility, must needs be after kissing divers of the maidens—married man though he was, and this got him some whacks from Much, the miller's son, besides a decent cudgelling from Will Stukely and Little John. Master Robin, Sir Marmaduke's fat butler, made a most jolly Friar Tuck; for with an irresistable droll humour in his roguish eyes, he would walk among the people dropping of his heavy quarter-staff upon their toes, whereupon if any cried out, he would very gravely preach them a famous sermon on patience under pain and affliction; and bidding them count their beads and say their paternosters, he would go his way.

Many persons had come to see these sports from the neighbouring villages, and these formed a crowd nearly all round the place. Sir Marmaduke and his guests had placed themselves on a piece of rising ground in front of the house, some lying of their lengths on the grass, some leaning against trees, some sitting, and some standing. Sir Johan kept by the side of his patron with a pleasant gravity, making a most admirable choice thanksgiving for the bounties all had received that day. Sir Reginald, who had only returned to the mansion the same morning, was with his friend Sir Valentine, gallantly attending upon a bevy of fair ladies who had come to witness the sports; and Master Peregrine was bustling about in a sort of fidgetty delight, explaining to every listener he could lay hold of, the history and antiquity of every part of the festival. It so happened that whilst St. George was stalking round the place, armed with spear and buckler, striving to look as heroic as ever could have done that renowned champion, he spied the dragon playing at bo-peep among the Morris-dancers, and almost at the same instant the dragon spied him. At which the latter commenced advancing into the middle of the open space betwixt the maypole and the guests, shaking of his wings, yelling, and hissing enough to frighten all the champions in Christendom.

St. George, however, was after him with long strides, till they met in a very choice place for fighting, when he addressed him in these words:—

> "Hallo, thou pitiful villain, art thou for turning tail?
> Stay here, I prythee, a moment, and I will make thee wail!"

Whereupon the dragon answered in a monstrous fustian voice—

> "Out on thee, Jack Pudding! or if thou needs must stay,
> I'll swallow thee—bones and all—and leave the rest for another day."

Then exclaimed the champion very valiantly, as became him—

> "Peace, knave! have done with thy humming and hawing."

And thereupon the monster replied, in an equally tearing humour—

> "Gogs wounds, if thou comest anigh me, I'll give thee a famous clawing!"

After a little more such brave language, in which each got famously abused by the other, they seemed intent upon a desperate combat of life and death. The dragon made more noise than ever he had; and came upon his adversary with his claws extended, and his mouth wide open, as though he meant to make of him but a mere mouthful; but St. George seemed quite up to his tricks, for he presently clenched his spear and braced his buckler, and gave the monster so sore a poke, he yelled till the place echoed with him. Then cried he out very lustily—

> "Wounds! thou caitiff vile! thou hast broken a joint of my tail—
> I die! I'm dead! Oh for a drop of small ale!"

At this moment up comes Much, the miller's son, with his pole and bladder, exclaiming to the deceased monster:—

> "What ho, Sir Dragon! hast indeed ceased thy snubbing?
> Mayhap thou wouldst be the better for a decent drubbing."

Upon which he began to lay upon the monster with his bladder with such force, the other started to life roaring like a town bull, crying out, as he rubbed himself, very pitifully—

> "Go hang for a knave, and thy thumping cease,
> Canst not let a poor dragon die in peace?"

But as the miller's son evidently had no bowels for the monster, the dragon would not stay any longer to be drubbed, and rose to take himself off with what speed he might; but just at this moment up came the hobby-horse, capering away in the most delicate fashion, and he thus addressed the other :—

"List, lordlings, list! I am here in my best graces
With my ambles, my trots, and my Canterbury paces.
Is not my tail fresh frizzled, and my mane new shorn,
And my bells and my plumes are they not bravely worn?
Stand up, Sir Dragon, and swear me sans remorse
There never was seen so rare a hobby horse."

Upon saying which he neighed like a young filly, and cantered and careered round the monster, so that he could not move in any way. Others of the characters came up, and they all had some droll thing or another to say; and it ended with the whole party joining hands for a dance round the maypole, which seeing, Master Peregrine, who had for the last hour fidgetted about as if he knew not what to do with himself, suddenly started from his place at the top of his speed, and in the next minute had got the dragon by one hand and the hobby-horse by the other, dancing round the maypole, to the infinite delight of the spectators, with as prodigal signs of glee as though he were the merriest of the lot.

The youthful Shakspeare played the part of king of the festival, and in princely sort he did it too; for it was remarked of many, so choice a Robin Hood and Maid Marian they had never seen. Doubtless he had famous opportunities for increasing his acquaintance with the blooming daughter of John Hathaway, and there is every reason for supposing he turned them to good account. In due time the sports ended, and he walked home with her and her father—who with his family had purposely enjoyed a holiday, induced to it by the representations of his new acquaintance—if not perfectly in love, as nigh to it as it was possible for him to be.

It was late in the evening of the same day when Sir Reginald, for the first time, found himself alone with his friend Sir Valentine, he having managed to draw the latter to walk with him in the park, convenient to the house. The sounds of revelry had ceased, and both actors and spectators had retired to their homes. The two young knights strolled together silently in the shadow of the trees, Sir Valentine thinking it would be a favourable opportunity for him to acquaint his friend with what had taken place betwixt him and the sovereign of his heart's affections, and ask his advice and assistance to carry on his suit to her to an honourable conclusion.

"Dost remember that exquisite sweet creature we rescued from villains at Kenilworth?" inquired Sir Reginald.

"Indeed do I, marvellously well," replied Sir Valentine, somewhat wondering his friend should begin to speak of the very subject of his own thoughts.

"I tell thee, Sir Valentine," continued the other, with exceeding earnestness, "all the whilst I was at court, even amongst the choicest damsels of the chiefest families of the kingdom, I could think of none other but her; for each did but remind me of her infinite superiority in all loveable delectable graces." His young companion walked on, listening with a pale cheek and a throbbing heart. "The first thing I did on approaching this neighbourhood," continued the other, "was to hie me to Charlcote, in the hope of delighting mine eyes with a glimpse of her fair beauty once again. I was so fortunate as to meet with her. She appeared lovelier than ever, and a sort of sadness was manifest in her dainty fair countenance, that made its attractiveness infinitely more touching. She seemed glad to see me. I assure thee I lingered in her delightsome society, utterly incapable of tearing myself away. Never met I a maiden of such moving graces, or of such delicate behaviour. In brief, I love her—as absolutely as ever fond heart can." Sir Valentine felt as though he could scarce breathe.

"I have sought thee here to tell thee of this," added Sir Reginald, "knowing thou art the truest friend that ever knight had; and I would make such trial of thy friendship as I would of none other living. My entire happiness is in the keeping of this most divine creature; and I would give worlds could I sigh at her feet, or bask in her smiles as often as I desire. But I have plighted my word to my honourable good friend, that notable brave gentleman, Sir Philip Sydney, to accompany him in a certain expedition he is preparing for, and therefore it must needs be I can have but small occasion for carrying on my suit. Being in this strait, and knowing of thy extreme trust-worthiness, and exceeding love for me, I would obtain at thy hands such true service, as for thee to seek out my soul's idol on all warrantable occasions, and with such affectionate rhetorick as thou canst master for so loving a purpose, urge her on my behalf. Give her no cause to mark my absence. Press her with passionate importunities. Let thy talk be ever of my devotion to her, and thy manner of such a sort as should convince her of its earnestness." Sir Valentine essayed to speak, but the words died unuttered in his throat.

"Can I have such important service rendered me?" inquired Sir Reginald. "But I am assured I cannot appeal to so true a friend unprofitably. I know enough of that honourable worthy nature to convince me nothing will be left undone that the circumstances require."

Sir Valentine managed at last to utter his consent to do what was required of him; and then fearful he should betray his own feelings if he stopped where he was, he made an excuse for hurrying away, wrung his friend's hand more affectionately than ever he had done, though at the moment his own heart was more forcibly wrung by the fierce trial he was undergoing, and left him, to school his nature into the doing of what he had undertaken.

CHAPTER XX.

Come, my Celia, let us prove
Whilst we can the joys of love;
Time will not be ours for ever;
He at length our good will sever.
Spend not then his gifts in vain;
Suns that set may rise again;
But if once we lose this light
'Tis with us perpetual night.

Ben Jonson.

Oh, with that
I wish to breath my last; upon thy lips,
Those equal twins of comeliness, I seal
The testament of honourable vows.
Whoever be that man that shall unkiss
The sacred print next, may he prove more thrifty
In this world's just applause, not more desertful.

Ford.

The behaviour of the youthful Shakspeare to the yeoman's blooming daughter, might, perchance, be to the marvel of some who have in their remembrance the infinite delicacy and retiringness of his conduct towards the beautiful foundling at Charlcote, but these things are to be considered—to wit, that he had in a manner out-lived that age of boyish shyness which so manifestly appeared in him, and with it that mere ideal adoration with which it was accompanied. His love for Mabel was but a sentiment, born in the mind and dying there, yet heralding the coming of another love, partaking more of passion than of sentiment, engrossing both the heart and the mind in all their entireness, and shewing such a vigorous existence as plainly proved how firm a hold it had on the powerfulest energies of life. Anne Hathaway was altogether different from the foundling. Her rich rosy complexion—her careless free glance, and her eloquent soft smile expressed quite another character. Her manners were equally opposite—being of that heedless enticing sort, which draweth all eyes admiringly, and soon suns them into a social delightsome warmth. But this was nothing more than the outward display of a natural fond temperament, where the heart was overflowing with generous sweet feelings, and was anxious for an object on whom to display its exceeding bountifulness. Such a one, clothed with such resistless fascinations, was sure to produce an extraordinary impression on the ardent nature of the young poet. Her approving glance—her seductive smile—or her slightest touch, filled him with a sense of joyousness no language could express.

These were unequivocal signs of love in its riper stage. At this period of youth the imprisoned affections burst from their womb, and start into life with impulses that will allow of no controlling.

Every thing weareth a new aspect. A rosier light shines through the atmosphere. A warmer breath is felt upon the breeze. A multitude of new feelings seem struggling in the breast to have free development, and in fact the whole humanity appeareth to take on itself a character perfectly distinct from that which it had previously worn. Nature now whispereth in the ear a secret unthought of hitherto; and all the man riseth at the intelligence, filled with a mysterious influence—a sense of happiness and power—and a knowledge of that sweet philosophy whose right use maketh a very Eden of delight to the Adams and Eves of every passing generation.

Anne Hathaway received the advances of her youthful lover so welcomingly, that he lacked nothing of inducement to proceed. Indeed, hers was not a disposition to withstand the passionate ardour of so prepossessing a wooer, and from the first hour of their meeting, she had regarded him with most favourable sentiments. It was some time after the May-day festival that the blooming Anne, as was customary with her, sat plying of her wheel in her old place, whilst her youthful lover, as was usual with him, had drawn a seat close to hers, having his arm resting on the back of her chair. Some exquisite speeches and passionate admiring looks from him, were followed by a sufficiency of sprightly answers and bright provoking glances from her. Thus had their mutual passion advanced and no further, but it was soon to shew more endearing signs.

"Canst affect verses, Anne?" inquired the young poet.

"Ay, a sweet love song, of all things," replied the village beauty, in her ordinary free-hearted way.

"Wouldst approve of them any the more if thou wert their subject?" asked he.

"Should I not?" answered she, archly. "Marry, I must needs think them the finest, sweetest verses ever writ."

"I have essayed the writing of some," continued her youthful lover, in a more tender manner. "But I am rather out of heart I have not produced a poem more worthy of thy exceeding merit."

"Hast, indeed, written something of me?" exclaimed the yeoman's buxom daughter, glancing at him a look of infinite curiosity and pleasure. "O' my word, now, I should be right glad to see it."

"If thou wilt promise to pardon my too great boldness, I will here read these, my poor verses," said the young poet. His companion was too eager to know what *could* he have written about her, to care much what she promised; so, whilst she sent her wheel round very diligently, her youthful lover drew a paper from beneath his doublet, and soon, with an exquisite impassioned manner, and soft mellow voice—somewhat tremulous here and there—he commenced reading what is here set down.

LOVE'S ARGOSIE.

"Awhile ago I pass'd an idle life
  Like as a leaf that's borne upon the breeze;
Thoughtless of love as lambkin of the knife,
  Or the young bird, of hawk, among the trees.

I knew not, thought not, cared not for the morrow,
And took unblessed my daily joy or sorrow.

"I saw the bounteous hand of Nature fling
Her princely largess over each green place;
I saw the blushes of the tender Spring
Hiding within the Summer's warm embrace;
I saw the hoarbeard Autumn fast expiring,
And Winter, in the year's grave, make a cheerful firing.

"Yet all the time was I as blind as mole
Who digs his habitation in the dark,
Though light there was, it fell not on my soul,
A fire burned bravely that shewed me no spark;
Whilst all owned Nature's spells, I saw no charming,
And still kept cold whilst others were a warming.

"When suddenly mine eyes threw ope their doors
And sunny looks flashed in their fond desires;
The chambers of my heart found glowing floors,
For there each hearth blazed with continual fires:
I saw the magic, felt the bliss 'twas bringing,
And knew the source whence these delights were springing.

"For then it was indifference met its death,
And my new life new climates seemed to seek;
The sweet South flung its odours from thy breath,
And the warm East came blushing o'er thy cheek.
Thy smiles were endless Summer's rosy dances,
And thy soft zone shone in thy torrid glances.

"And as thy wondrous beauty I beheld,
A thousand unknown raptures on me came;
The flood of life, by some strange power impelled,
Rushed through its channels, turned to liquid flame:
And then with me there seemed such blooming weather
As though all seasons shower'd their flowers together.

"And as I basked in thy subduing gaze,
And caught the thrilling spirit of thy smile;
I marvelled I had lived so many days,
So blind, so cold, so ignorant the while;
'Certes,' quoth I, 'I've been in far off places,
Else had I sooner known such moving graces.'

"Ay—in strange latitudes and unknown waves,
Having no compass, aid of chart denied,
There rose before me mountains, plains, and caves,
And a new world my curious vision spied:
And then it was that fair country thy beauty
Brought me to anchor—a most welcome duty.

"To turn discovery to best account,
I studied every feature of the land;
I scanned where'er the highest fruit could mount,
I touched the tender produce of thy hand;
And every where such heaps of sweets were growing,
No place on earth could be so worth the knowing.

"Then having this bright world so newly found,
And learned its fitness for an honest home,
Must I be now on a fresh voyage bound
Again in unknown latitudes to roam?
Oh might I name it, hold it, own it, rather,
And from its spoil a matchless fortune gather!

"Dear heart! sweet life! most admirable fair saint!
  To thee my soul its fond devotion brings,
Like a poor pilgrim weary, worn, and faint
  To taste the comfort which thy beauty brings:
Hear how thy praise all excellence excelleth!
Hear how my prayer within my worship dwelleth!

"Believe me the fond charm thou dost possess,
  Is not a gift meant to be idly used,
But a kind solace that should most to bless
  That heart whose blessings thou hast not refused.
I see in it a promise and a token
Of flowery bands that never can be broken.

"And now like those bold mariners of ships,
  That from all ports do take their merchandize,
My bark would I unlade upon thy lips
  Which awhile since I freighted at thine eyes.
Yet e'er from such kind port my sails are fading,
Would not I bear away a richer lading.

"Bring here the ivory of thy fair arms,
  And lustrous jewels which thine eyelids hold,
Bring here the crowning of thy store of charms,
  The silky treasures which thy brows enfold;
Bring here the luscious fruits thy soft cheek beareth,
And those rare pearls and rubies thy mouth weareth!

"But that which doth them all in rareness beat—
  The choicest traffic brought from loving isles—
Bring me the dainty balm and odorous sweet,
  That fills thy tempting treasury of smiles:
That whilst I am filled with Beauty's precious blisses,
Thou makest me—an argosie of kisses!"

It was scarce possible to have met with a prettier sight than the yeoman's blooming daughter listening, with her eyes sparkling unutterable pleasure, as the young poet read to her her tuneful praises. The wheel went round, but she spoke not a word. Indeed she would not hazard so much as a syllable, fearful she might by it lose some part of those, to her, exquisite verses. At the conclusion, wherein his voice sunk to a tremulous soft murmur, he lifted his gaze from the paper to the flushed countenance of his fair compainon, and received a glance he could not fail to understand. Upon a sudden, his arm fell from the back of her chair, and encircled her girdle, and—and—and—the wheel stopped for a full minute.

"Humph!" exclaimed a familiar voice, close at hand, and, starting from their affectionate embrace, they beheld John Hathaway with that peculiar expression peeping from the corners of his eyes and mouth, which marked the more than ordinary pleasure he took in any thing. In a moment, the blushing Anne was diligently looking on the ground for something she had never lost; and her youthful lover, in quite as rosy a confusion, was gallantly assisting her to find it. To the father's sly questions, the daughter answered a little from the purpose; and as for the young poet, he all at once remembered some pressing duty that called him thence, took a hurried leave of his friend, the yeoman, who was evidently laughing in his sleeve the whilst, and with a quick fond glance, repaid with interest, to his fair mistress—whose sprightliness had somehow forsaken her—he wended his way back to Stratford.

In very truth, he was in far too happy a state to have stayed where he was, and a third person by. His feelings were in a complete tumult; his thoughts in a delicious confusion. He felt as if he could have taken the whole world in his arms, he was on such friendly terms with every one. He experienced the delightful consciousness of being loved—to him a new and rare enjoyment—and his was a disposition fitted to receive it with a sense of such extreme pleasure as humanity hath seldom known. What were his thoughts when he could get to any reasonable thinking—or his feelings, when he returned to his ordinary sensations, I cannot take upon me to say; but all pointed to one subject, and rose from one subject; and whether he regarded himself or the world around him, it came to the same matter. To him every thing was Anne Hathaway; but especially all wisdom, goodness, beauty, and delight, took from her their existence, and gave to her their qualities. She was, in brief, the sun round which the rest of creation must needs take its course. In this excitement of mind and heart he proceeded on his path, only brought to a more sober state as he neared home. It so happened, at the outskirts of the town, his attention was forcibly attracted by the riotous shouting of a crowd round the horse pond.

"Prythee tell me, what meaneth this huge disturbance?" inquired he of one of a knot of old women, who, beating the end of her stick furiously on the ground, knocked together her pointed nose and chin, as she poked her head towards one, and then towards another, with all the thorough earnestness of a confirmed gossip.

"Meaneth it?" replied Mother Flytrap, in her cracked treble, as she rested her two hands upon her stick, and thrust her ancient visage close to the face of the querist. "By my fackings, it meaneth the very horriblest, infamousness that ever was seen in this mortal world. But it's what we must all come to."

"Ay, marry—flesh is grass!" said another old beldame.

"But I have my doubts—I have my doubts, gossip," mumbled out another of the tribe; "it hath been credibly said strange lights and unchristian noises have appeared in her cottage; and I did myself see, standing at her door, the very broom some do say she flies through the air upon."

"Odds codlings, hast though, indeed?" inquired Mother Flytrap, with something like horror muffled up in the lines of her parchment skin. "Well, if she *be* a witch, she must either drown or swim—that's one comfort."

"Who's a witch?" asked William Shakspeare, who had turned from one to the other of his companions, in a vain hope of getting the intelligence he required.

"God's precious! who but Nurse Cicely, that hath bewitched Farmer Clodpole's cows," replied one of the women; and scarce were the words out of her mouth, when the young poet, with an infinite small shew of gallantry, pushed his way through them, and rushed with all his force into the crowd. The outcries he heard seemed to him the yells of savage beasts eager for blood. Shouts of "In with her!"—"Drown the old witch!" and all sorts of oaths and ribald expressions came to his ears, with the half-choked screaming of their victim. He thrust himself forward, pushing the crowd to the right and to the left, till he stood upon the brink of the pond; and just beheld his faithful old nurse emerging from the water, gasping for breath, whilst some dozen or so of rude ploughboys, butchers, and the like characters, kept encouraging one another in helping to drown the poor creature. Without a word said, William Shakspeare sprung upon the busiest of the lot, and tumbled him into the pond, evidently to the exceeding pleasure of the majority of the spectators. Perchance, his companions would have resented this, but directly young Shakspeare made his appearance a throng of his old associates hurried from all parts of the crowd, and made a simultaneous rush upon the tormentors of the poor nurse, by which help, divers of them were presently sent floundering alongside of their fellow, the which the lookers-on seemed to enjoy above all things.

Whilst Humphrey, now growing to be monstrous valiant, Greene, Burbage, Hemings, and Condell were, with others of a like spirit, putting to flight such of the lewd villains as seemed inclined to stand out upon the matter, William Shakspeare carefully drew Nurse Cicely out of the pond, untied her bonds, and bore her, all dripping as she was, to her own cottage, where, with the assistance of some humane neighbours, he at last succeeded in rescuing her from the death with which she had been threatened. The gratitude of the poor creature was beyond all conceiving; and at last, the object of it felt obliged to take himself out of hearing of her earnest prodigal thankfulness and praise.

Among the observers of the scene just described, regarding the chief personage in it with more intentness than any there, was a somewhat crabbed-looking man, meanly clad, who, from beside a tree a little above the pond, had witnessed the whole transaction. When the woman was rescued, he followed her deliverer at some distance, accosting none, and replying to such as were hardy enough to speak to him, in so rough unmannerly a manner few sought acquaintance with him. Whilst William Shakspeare was in the cottage, this person loitered at a little way from it, occasionally leaning on his staff, with his eyes fixed upon the ground—then glancing at the cottage-door, and strolling leisurely about without losing sight of it.

As the young poet was hastening from his old nurse's dwelling, in a famous pleasure with the result of his exertions, he heard some one close at his heels. Presently, a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and, turning round, he beheld John a Combe, the usurer. He had long been familiar with his person, having met with him before frequently, and had imbibed a respect for his character from the favourable opinions of him expressed by his parents. Such portion of his history as was known he had been made acquainted with from many sources, but the mystery which had enveloped him since his extraordinary change, he had never acquired any more knowledge of than the rest of his townsfolk.

"Dost shrink from me, boy?" inquired John a Combe, in a sharp thick voice, as he noticed a sudden start of surprise in the youth when he recognised the usurer. "Art ashamed of being seen with Old Ten in the Hundred? Wouldst desire no acquaintance with one whose heart clingeth to his gold, and shutteth his soul against all sympathy with humanity?"

"I think not of you in that way, Master Combe, believe me," replied his young companion, with his usual gentle courtesy.

"Then thou art a fool, Will Shakspeare!" gruffly exclaimed the other; "heed thou the general voice. Ask of whomsoever thou wilt concerning of John a Combe, the usurer. Will they not tell thee he is a very heartless tyrant, who liveth upon the widow's sighs and the orphan's tears,—who grinds the poor man's bones, and drinks the prodigal's blood? Do they not swear in the very movingest execrations he is a persecuting relentless enemy to all his race, who careth only to set baits for their carcasses, and when he hath got them in his toils, sheweth them no more mercy than a hungry wolf?"

"I never heard of such things," replied William Shakspeare. "Indeed, I have known divers speak of you as having shewn such honourable good qualities as entitled you to the love of all honest men."

"Then were they greater fools than thou art," sharply exclaimed John a Combe, "I tell thee I am such a one. I find my happiness in the misery of others. I live when my fellows die. My heart is but a pedestal that carrieth a golden image, at which I force all the children of want to bow themselves down, and then trample on their necks to make me sport."

"In very truth, I can believe nothing of it, worthy sir," observed his young companion. "Methinks too, what you have said is so opposite to what I have heard from the crediblest testimony you have done, that it is too unnatural to be true. Was it not Master Combe, who spent his substance freely to better the condition of his poorer neighbours? Was it not Master Combe, who held his life as at a pin's fee, to guard his fellow-creatures from the destroying pestilence?"

"Ay, I was once of that monstrous folly," said the usurer, with great bitterness; "I carried wine in a sieve—only to be spilled upon barren ground. What have I learned by this prodigal expenditure and silly painstaking? The notable discovery that men are knaves and women wantons—that friendship is a farce and love a cheat—that honesty is a fool and honour a bubble—and that the whole world hath but one particular influence on which its existence holds—and that is utter villany."

"As far as I have seen, everything of which you have spoken hath an entire difference," said the other. "That there may be bad men amongst the good I cannot take upon me to deny; but that this should condemn all mankind for vileness, seemeth exceeding unjust. According to what I have learned, man in favourable circumstances will generally be found possessed of the best qualities of manhood; and such is the natural excellence of his nature, that even under most unfit occasions the proper graces of humanity will flourish in him as bravely as though they had the most tender culture."

"Tut!" cried John a Combe, impatiently; "'tis the opinion of such as have gained their knowledge in closets. They take for granted what is told them, and their poor pride will not allow of their crediting anything that is to the prejudice of their own natures."

"And as for woman," continued the young poet more earnestly, "'tis hard to say one word against a creature so excellently gifted. Methinks she would make praise a beggar, by her worthiness taking all he hath!"

"Ha! ha!" exclaimed the usurer in a sort of scornful laugh. "Why, boy, thy nature is in a rare humour to be *cozened*. Didst ever hear of any particular villany outviling all things, that did not come of a woman? Who was it that first held fellowship with a serpent for man's undoing,—on which occasion she shewed how near her disposition was to the crawling crafty venom of her chosen associate. But she soon outdid the reptile in his own vocation; and now her craft would laugh the fox to scorn, and her guile cheat the serpent to his face."

"I should be loath to think so ill of her, having had most convincing proofs of her different character," said the youthful Shakspeare, with a very pleasurable remembrance of one at least of that sex. "For mine own part I conceive there is no telling all her goodness; but I do remember some sentences in which it doth appear to me her true nature is most admirably painted, and they are these:—'of her excellence I would content myself with asking—what virtue is like to a woman's? What honesty is like to a woman's? What love—what courage—what truth—what generousness—what self-denial—what patience under affliction, and forgiveness for every wrong, come at all nigh unto such as a woman sheweth? Believe me, the man who cannot honour so truly divine a creature, is an ignorant poor fellow, whom it would be a compliment to style a fool,—or an ungrateful mean wretch, whom charity preventeth me from calling a villain!' Said you not these words, Master Combe, for I have been told they were of your own speaking?"

"Doubtless!" exclaimed John a Combe with a sarcastic emphasis, "I was, when I uttered such words, as thou art now—moved by a strong belief in the existence of qualities with which my wishes were more familiar than my vision. Appearances looked fair, and I took for granted all things were what they seemed. But of most choice matters woman seemed infinitely the rarest. There is nought I would not have said—there is nought I would not have done, to prove how far above ordinary merit I thought her exceeding excellence. I was a fool—a poor, ignorant, weak fool, who will readily take brass well gilt for the sterling metal. I had to learn my lesson, and in good time it was thoroughly taught me. Experience rubbed off the external shew of worth that had cheated mine eyes into admiration and my heart into respect; and the base stuff in all its baseness stood manifestly confessed before me. Woman!" added he with increasing bitterness, "go search the stagnant ditch that fills the air with pestilential poison—where toads and snakes fester among rotting weeds, and make a reeking mass of slime and filth around them,—I tell thee, boy, nothing of all that vileness approacheth to the baseness of her disposition. Woman! She is an outrage upon nature, and a libel upon humanity.—A fair temptation that endeth in most foul disappointment.—The very apples on the shores of the dead sea, that are all blooming without and all rottenness within—a thing that hath never been truly described save under those shapes believed in a past religion, whose features were human, and whose person bestial. Woman! She is the mother of infamy, ready to play the wanton with all the vices, and fill the world with a fruitful progeny of crimes. She is the cozener of honesty—the mockery of goodness—a substantial deceit—a living lie!"

"I pray you pardon me," said his young companion; "these are most intolerable accusations, and no warrant for them as I can see."

"Warrant!" cried the usurer, now with his whole frame trembling with excitement; "I have had such warrant—such damnable warrant as leaveth me not the shadow of a doubt on the matter. I have heard—I have seen—I have felt!" continued he, grasping the shoulder of the youth convulsively, then seeming to make a mighty effort to conquer his emotions, which for a moment appeared almost to choke him, he added in a calmer voice—"But it matters not. Perchance thou wilt have the wit to discover all that I would have said. I am in no mind to let the gossips of the town meddle with my secrets. I like not they should say 'poor John a Combe!' for I care not to have their pity. Say not to any thou hast spoke to me on such a subject, and when hast a mind to pass an hour with Ten in the Hundred, come to my dwelling; I should be glad to see thee, which I would say of no other person. Thou art the son of an honest man, and I have seen signs in thee that prove thou art worthy of thy father." Saying these words, John a Combe hastily took his departure down a turning in the street, leaving William Shakspeare marvelling hugely at what had passed between them.

CHAPTER XXI.

Follow a shadow, it still flies you,
Seem to fly it, it will pursue;
So court a mistress, she denies you,
Let her alone she will court you.
Ben Jonson.

"And now I dare say," said Sir Bohort, "that Sir Launcelot, though there thou liest, thou wert never matched of none earthly knight's hands. And thou wert the curtiest knight that ever beare shield. And thou wert the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrod horse. And thou wert the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman. And thou wert the kindest man that ever stroke with sword. And thou wert the goodliest person that ever came among prese of knights. And thou wert the meekest and the gentlest that ever eate in hall among ladies."

A book of the noble historyes of Kynge Arthur, and of certeyn of his knyghtes.

Sir Valentine found he had undertaken a most hard duty. The more he essayed to struggle with his own inclinations, the more strongly they rose against such usage. He tried to preach himself into a cheerful acquiescence with the obligation imposed upon him, from every text of honour, friendship, and chivalry, with which he was acquainted, but he found nature rather an unwilling convert, as she is at all times when her faith already resteth upon the religion of love. Nevertheless, he determined to do Sir Reginald the promised service, however difficult of accomplishment it might be. In very truth he was one of those rare instances of friendship that act up to the character they profess. In numberless cases there are persons calling themselves friends, who are friends only to themselves. They are ready enough to take the name, but shrink from a proper performance of the character. Friendship in its honourablest state is a continual self-sacrifice on the altar of social feeling, combined with a devotion which ever inclineth to exalt the object of its regard above all humanity. A true friend alloweth himself as it were to be the shadow of another's merit, attending on all his wants, hopes, and pleasures, and ever keeping of himself in the back ground when he is like to interfere with his happiness. And yet there have been such despicable mean spirits who would hide their contemptibleness under so fair a cloak. They profess friendship, but they act selfishness. Nay, to such a pitch do they debase themselves, that they would behold unfeelingly him they call their friend pining away his heart for some long expected happiness, and basely rob him of it when it required but their assistance to ensure it to his glad possession.

The young knight was of a far different sort. Even with so powerful a competitor as love, he would give himself entirely to friendship. He knew that the assistance he had promised to render his friend would cost him his own happiness, but he could not for a moment tolerate the idea of building his enjoyment with the materials of his friend's felicity. He believed that if Sir Reginald knew what were his feelings towards the object of their mutual affection, he would on the instant resign his pretensions, that his friend's hopes might not be disappointed; and therefore the young knight was the more resolute in fulfilling the wishes of his faithful companion, and as an important step towards the consummation, kept the secret of his own love locked up closely in his breast. He heard Sir Reginald again express his desires, and again did he declare his readiness to assist in their realisation. He saw his friend depart to join Sir Philip Sydney, and experienced an exquisite satisfaction in knowing that the other had left him without the slightest suspicion of his own true feelings.

Time passed on, and Sir Valentine strove to perform his task. He had seen but little of Mabel for a long time past, for she scarce ever ventured alone any distance from the house, fearing she might be again carried off as she had been before; and this accounted for her not having been seen for so long a period by the youthful Shakspeare. At last the young knight contrived to speak with her, and to his entreaties for her private company, to acquaint her with a matter of some importance it was necessary she should know, she named a spot in the park where she would meet him that evening after dusk. And there she attended true to her appointment. Sir Valentine, as he gazed upon her admirable beauty, felt that he had much to perform, but he tried all he could to stifle his feelings, and think of no other thing save the advancement of his friend's wishes. Alack! he was setting about a most perilous task. To play the suitor of an exquisite fair creature as proxy for another, methinks for one of his youth and disposition was great temptation; but having already loved her with all the ardour of a first fond affection, now to woo her merely as the representative of his friend, looks to be a thing out of the course of nature.

"Methinks this friend of yours must needs have taken entire possession of your thoughts," observed Mabel, with a smile, upon finding that at every interview the young knight could say nought but praise of Sir Reginald. "I cannot get you to talk of any other thing."

"Indeed, so gallant a gentleman and so perfect a knight doth not exist," replied Sir Valentine. "I have seen him, lady, in the thickest of the field, bearing himself so bravely as was the marvel of both foes and friends."

"And were you in that battle?" inquired she, with a singular curiousness; "I pray you tell me how it was fought. I should like much to hear what share you had in it. I doubt not you behaved very gallantly."

"I kept in the press as nigh to Sir Reginald as I could," continued the young knight; "for I knew much honour was only to be reaped where he led the way. Truly he is a knight of most approved valour."

"I cannot doubt it, since you have so said," replied Mabel, impatiently. "But I beseech you leave all speech of him, and take to telling me of your own knightly achievements."

“By this light, lady, I am nought in his comparison with Sir Reginald,” said his friend, earnestly; “never met I a gentleman so worthy of the love of woman. Indeed, I know he is kindly esteemed of many noble dames; yet in his estimation all such have been but indifferently thought of, since his knowledge of your so much brighter perfections.”

“Surely, he doth great wrong to those noble dames by thinking at all of me,” observed the fair foundling.

“He doth consider you so pre-eminent in excellence, language cannot express his admiration,” added Sir Valentine.

“I feel bound to him for his good opinion,” said Mabel. “Yet I should have been glad had he shewn more discretion than in bestowing it so prodigally.”

“The love of so noble a knight ought to be regarded as a most costly jewel,” continued the young knight. “I cannot think so proud a gift is to be met with.”

“Perchance not,” replied his companion, coldly. “Yet I cannot say it hath any particular attractions in my eyes.”

Here was a new difficulty to be overcome. The lovely object of his friend's attachment cared not to be loved by him. This he had not calculated upon. Sir Reginald's happiness appeared farther from his possession than Sir Valentine could have imagined. Nevertheless, the latter was not to be daunted by such an appearance.

Mabel had by this time met Sir Valentine many times, almost with as much confidence as she had known at their first interviews, for she had neither seen nor heard of her noble gallant and the villains his associates, since her escape. The young knight, at his earliest convenience, had rode to the house for the express purpose of punishing the traitor for his intended villany, when he found the place shut up close and deserted, and none could tell him where its late inmates had gone; from which it was argued they had left that part of the country out of fear their offences had been discovered. Nevertheless, it was not till recently the poor foundling could hazard herself by walking in the park, as she had used; though, to make her venturing as secure as possible, Sir Valentine, from a neighbouring eminence, watched, on a fleet steed, her coming and returning. In truth, the chiefest pleasure she had was meeting this gallant gentleman; and she could think of no evil when she found him leading of his palfrey by the bridle, walking at her side in some retired part of the grounds; or having tied the animal to a branch, standing by her under the shelter of a neighbouring tree, entertaining of her with his choice discourse. Still did she listen with manifest disrelish to whatever the young knight reported of his friend, and the more admired the honourableness of the speaker without caring a whit for the object of his eulogy. She had noticed that of late such tender gallantries as he had been accustomed to exhibit, he had altogether withdrawn, and this she regarded with especial uneasiness. He was always repeating his friend's opinion of her, and ceased to say one word of his own thoughts on that subject; and this behaviour in him pleased her not at all. She often considered the matter very intently, and upon coming to the conclusion she had become indifferent to him, it put her into a great discomfort. It hath alredy been said she had some pride in her—pride in its gracefullest shape—and at such instigation it was like to be called into action; but if it did shew itself, it came so garmented in humility, that none would have known it for what it was, save those nobler natures with whom such appearances are familiar.

"I am much grieved at noticing of this change in you," said Mabel to her companion, on one occasion. "If you think of me unworthily, methinks it would more become your gallant disposition to tell me in what I am amiss, or go seek the company of some more proper person. Should I have lost your esteem, I cannot be fit for your society."

"O' my life, I do esteem you above all creatures!" exclaimed the young knight, fervently, and then, as if recollecting of himself, added, "For one that is so highly esteemed of my noble friend, cannot but be worthy of my highest estimation."

"Truly, I would rather you rated me at your own judgment, than followed the appreciation of any other," observed the beautiful foundling, in something like a tone of disappointment.

"Then, be assured, I rate you at a value immeasurably beyond all other estimation!" earnestly exclaimed Sir Valentine.

"Indeed!" murmured the delighted Mabel.

"I mean—I would so esteem you, were I the worthy Sir Reginald," added the young knight, quickly.

"Ah, me! it is ever Sir Reginald with you!" cried his fair companion, in evident dejectedness. "Against Sir Reginald's worthiness I could not say one word, because you have affirmed it; but I do declare to you, for the hundredth time, I heed it no more than if I never heard of it."

"But surely you will not allow his honourable regard of you to come to an unprofitable ending?" said Sir Valentine, in a famous-moving manner. "O' my life, he deserveth not his fortunes should be of such desperate issue. I beseech you, think better of his princely qualities. I pray you, have proper consideration of his noble character."

"'Tis impossible that I can regard him as he is desirous I should," observed the other.

"And why not?" inquired the young knight. "Allow me at least the privilege of asking your reason for leaving to intolerable wretchedness, one who would devote his heart to your service?"

"Tell him," said Mabel, sinking of her voice almost to a whisper—"tell him, I regard another so entirely, no one else can have footing in my thoughts."

"Alack, what ill news for him!" exclaimed Sir Valentine. "But think me not over bold at asking of you, is he so worthy—is he so noble—is he so valiant a knight, and so true a gentleman, as my poor friend?"

"Ay, that is he, I am assured!" cried the poor foundling, with an earnestness that came from the heart.

"Truly, I thought not such another existed," replied the young knight. "Indeed, I would willingly go any distance to meet with so estimable a person."

"Methinks you need not go far to find him," murmured Mabel, as she bent her looks so upon the ground her long eye-lashes appeared perfectly closed. Sir Valentine was silent for some few minutes. He could not mistake the meaning of her words. At first the gratification they gave him was beyond conception exquisite; but then followed the reflection, how poorly he would be playing the part he had undertaken, did he attempt in any way to take advantage of the confession she had just made.

"In all honesty, I must say, this person you so honour hath not a tithe of the merit of Sir Reginald," said the young knight, in a voice that faltered somewhat. "Neither in the suitable accomplishments of a knight, nor in the honourable gifts of a man, can he for a moment be compared with my gallant friend. I beseech you, let not one so little worthy of your regard, receive of you the estimation which should only belong to one so truly deserving of it as the noble Sir Reginald."

"I see! I see!" exclaimed the poor foundling, exceedingly moved by this speech of her companion. "You cannot disguise it from me, strive you ever so. I have fallen from your esteem. I have lost your respect. Fare you well, sweet sir. This must be our last meeting. I hold your noble qualities too deeply in my reverence to allow of their standing hazard of debasement by their association with any unworthiness."

In vain the young knight gave her all manner of assurance she was the highest in his esteem—in vain he sought the help of entreaties and persuasions she would stay and hear his reasons for his so behaving, she seemed bent on leaving him that moment, with a full determination never to see him more. At last, however, she yielded so far as to promise to meet him the next evening at the same place, for the last time, and then returned home in a greater sadness than she had ever known. From that hour to the hour appointed for this final interview, Sir Valentine passed in considering what course he should adopt under these trying circumstances. On one side was the happiness of his absent friend entrusted to his custody—on the other, the affections of a most beautiful sweet creature he had obtained by seeking of her society. Honour demanded of him he should not do his friend disadvantage, and love entreated he would not abandon his mistress now that he had completely won her heart. The more he thought, the less easy seemed his duty, for he saw that in each case, if he attended to the claim of one it would destroy every hope of the other.

Mabel was true to her appointment. Sir Valentine rode up to her, and as usual tied his horse to a branch. The customary greetings passed, and the young knight observed that his fair companion looked wondrous pale and agitated.

"What hath so moved you?" inquired he, courteously.

"Hitherto I have thought myself safe from further molestation from the villains into whose power I once fell," replied Mabel. "But I have just discovered that they are again pursuing of their treacherous intentions."

"I pray you, tell me where I may find them," said Sir Valentine, with a most earnest eagerness. "I promise you they shall molest you no longer."

"I thank you with all my heart!" exclaimed the poor foundling fervently; "yet your interference can be of no avail at this time. The very traitor who bore me forcibly from this park, and from whose base grasp you previously rescued me in the gardens at Kenilworth, is now being entertained by Sir Thomas Lucy."

"Surely, Sir Thomas, when he is told of his baseness, will drive him from his house!" observed the young knight.

"He will hear of nothing against him—nor will Dame Lucy," answered Mabel. "They say I am mistaken, though I could swear to him among a thousand. They will have it he is a person of worship, whom they have known many years; yet I am convinced he is as paltry a wretch as ever disgraced this world."

"By this light, dear Mabel, I will go and make him confess his villany!" cried Sir Valentine, moving, as if he would to the house on the instant.

"I beseech you, do not, sweet sir," implored his fair companion, as she caught hold of him by the arm. "Ever since my escape I have lived a most unhappy life, though never made I any complaint, for both the justice and the dame will have it I must have been greatly to blame, else none would have laid a hand on me; and say what I would, I could not persuade them of my innocency. Of all persons living they look on you with greatest suspicion, though I am certain you have given them not a shadow of cause, and your appearance at this or any time would do me more mischief than you can imagine."

"But it cannot be that you are to be left to this uncivil treatment," exclaimed the other urgently. "I will not allow of a thing so monstrous. Never heard I such unjust unnatural usage. It must not be suffered."

"Indeed it must—for there is no honest way of escaping from it, as I can see," answered the poor foundling. "There is some scheme afoot I feel assured, else why is the caitiff there—and that evil is intended me by it, I have had more than sufficient proofs, or I should not have known him to be the villain he is; but as yet I know not in what shape it will come. I am in terrible apprehension of the worst, yet I see not how I can avoid it if it visit me."

"There is one way," said Sir Valentine, whose feelings had been put into such extreme excitement, he could think of nothing but the safety of the fair creature who seemed now so completely thrown on him for protection. "There is but one way, dearest Mabel," repeated he in a fonder tone than he had allowed himself to use a long while. "If you have that regard for me you have expressed, and will not be moved to favour my friend's suit, I beseech you honour me to that extent as would lead you to trust your happiness to my keeping; and I promise, by the word of a true knight, I will carry you from the evils with which you are threatened to the sure refuge of my kinsman's house, where without delay I will give myself that firm title to be your protector which can only be gained from the honourable bonds of marriage."

"Marriage!" repeated Mabel, with a more unhappy aspect than she had yet shewn. "Surely you have been all this time in a strange ignorance; and I too—methinks I have been in a dream. That word hath fully wakened me. I see now, and for the first time, how I have been dressing up my heart in shadows. Oh, how great hath been my folly! I have sought what I thought an innocent pleasure from sources as far above my reach as are the stars. Alas, what extreme thoughtlessness! What marvellous self-delusion!"

"What meaneth this?" inquired the young knight, full of wonder at this sudden change in her.

"Know you not, honourable sir, I am only a poor foundling!" asked Mabel earnestly. "Have you not heard I am a mere friendless creature, picked up by chance, and fostered by charity?"

"In very truth I have not," replied Sir Valentine, surprised at hearing such intelligence.

"Then such I am," said the poor foundling. "Nay, I am so poorly off, that even the very name I bear is a stranger's gift. Mother or father have I never known; and such is my mean estate that I cannot claim kindred with any of ever so humble a sort. Oh, I would you had known of this before. I am much to blame for not telling you of it sooner; but in all honesty, sweet sir, it never entered my thoughts."

"That I have remained ignorant of what you have just told me, is mine own fault only," replied her companion. "But I cannot think of drawing back from my engagements at such a discovery. Rich or poor, noble or simple, you are the same admirable fair creature I have so long loved, and that hath honoured me with her regard, therefore if you will trust yourself to my care, doubt not of obtaining at least the respect my poor name can bestow upon you."

"It cannot be!" exclaimed the other, determinedly. "I could never do you so notable a wrong as to thrust my meanness into your honourable family. I could not bear you to be ashamed of me, and such it must needs come to when any put question to you of your wife's lineage. Oh, I *now* see more and more how ill I have acted in seeking of your society. I enjoyed the present moment totally regardless of the bar between us, that divided our fortunes an impassable distance. I beseech you to forgive me, honourable sir. As quickly as you can, forget that one of such humble fortunes as your unhappy Mabel ever existed. I would not I should give you a moment's uneasiness. As for myself, whatever may be my wretched fate, or however degraded my condition, I shall have a happiness in my thoughts which will ever rank me with the most worthy, for I can remember I have attained to such proud elevation as to be the love of the noblest, truest, and most perfect gentleman fond heart ever loved."

"Dearest! sweetest life!" cried Sir Valentine, passionately clasping her in his embraces. Mabel for a few moments allowed herself to receive his endearments, then suddenly tore herself from his arms, looking more pale and sad than before.

"This must not be," exclaimed she, with a desperate effort, as she motioned him back. "If you will not break my heart, I pray you—I beseech you, honourable sir, grant me one request."

"Willingly," replied the young knight, for tears were on her eyelids, and she looked on him so movingly he could have refused her nothing.

"Never approach me again," said the hapless Mabel, in a voice almost stifled by her feelings. "Nay," exclaimed she, with more firmness, as she noticed he appeared about to speak, "if you hold me in any respect—if I am not the abject thing in your eyes, I am with the rest of the world, seek not to hinder me in my resolution. I must see you no more. I cannot—will not allow of another meeting. On reflection, your own honourable nature will assure you that this is as much for my welfare as your own. Care not for me, only so far as this may be your consolation, that, however servile may be my state, though I become the veriest drudge that ever lived out a life of miserable slavery, still shall I remain the creature you have honoured with your love. I will endure all things to live in such honesty as I have known hitherto. I implore you, if you value my peace of mind, regard my last wish. Attempt not to detain me here a moment longer. I must leave you.—Fare you well, sir.—From the very depths of my heart I thank you for your extreme goodness to me. May the sweetest happiness that should crown such nobleness as yours wait upon all your doings. Again, and for the last time, honourable sir!—fare you well!"

"Mabel! dear, sweet Mabel! I beseech you leave me not thus! I will not live without you! I cannot love another!"

"Truly, this is playing a friend's part, Sir Valentine!" cried Sir Reginald, rudely grasping the young knight by the arm, as he seemed about to follow the retreating Mabel. "Why, thou pitiful traitor! thou shame to knighthood—thou dishonour to friendship! What demon hath tempted thee to such villanous doings? By my troth, now, had I not seen this with mine own eyes, I would never have believed it."

Sir Valentine was a little confounded at the unexpected appearance of his friend; and knowing the circumstances in which he had been found, he was sensible they gave colour to Sir Reginald's accusation he might find it difficult to remove. "Indeed, I am but little to blame, Sir Reginald," replied he; "and I doubt not you will acknowledge it readily, when you have heard all I have to say to you."

"Doubtless," observed the other, in a manner somewhat sarcastic; "I go on a distant journey, placing such confidence in thy seeming honourableness as to entrust thee with the furthering of my suit to my mistress during my absence; and I return to find thee basely seeking to rob me of my happiness, by proffering her thine own affections. Truly, thou art but little to blame!"

"I do assure you, Sir Reginald——"

"Fie, sir!" exclaimed his companion roughly. "Thou hast a rapier—methinks thou shouldst know the use of it. Leave thy tongue, and take to a fitter weapon." And so saying he drew his own from its scabbard.

"By all that's honourable in knighthood——"

"What!" exclaimed the other, fiercely interrupting him; "wouldst play the coward as well as the villain! wouldst do me such foul wrong as thou hast been about, and then shrink from the punishment thou hast so justly deserved? O' my conscience, I thought not so mean a wretch was to be found. Draw, caitiff, without a word more, or I will beat thee like a dog."

"As Heaven is my witness, I entertain this quarrel most reluctantly," said Sir Valentine, drawing out his rapier. "I cannot see that I have wronged you in any way; and I am convinced you would be the first to say so, knew you all that hath happened."

"To thy defence, sirrah!" replied Sir Reginald, angrily. "I am not to be cozened out of a proper vengeance." And at this he began very furiously to thrust at his companion, who sought only to defend himself, which he did with such skill, that his opponent got more enraged every moment, and gave him all manner of ill words; but still Sir Valentine kept on his defence, and would not so much as make a single pass at his friend. This continued till Sir Reginald, pressing on with desperate haste, fell on his opponent's rapier with his whole force.

"Alack, what have I done!" exclaimed the young knight, as he beheld his faithful companion in arms drop bleeding to the ground. "Oh, I have slain the noblest knight that ever wielded spear, and the truest friend that ever was sincere to man. O' my life, I meant to do you no hurt, and I can say with the same honesty I have done you no offence." Finding he got no answer, he knelt beside his wounded friend, and took his hand, and entreated him very movingly he would not die at enmity with him, if he was as dangerously hurt as he seemed. Still he received no reply, which put him almost in a phrenzy, by assuring him he had killed him. Finding, however, that Sir Reginald breathed, he very carefully took him in his arms, and placed him so that he might recline against the broad stem of a neighbouring tree, and then leaping on his steed, he started off at the top of his speed to get the necessary assistance.

CHAPTER XXII.

No wher so besy a man as he ther n'as,
And yet he semed besier than he was.
CHAUCER.

How that foolish man,
That reads the story of a woman's face,
And dies believing it, is lost for ever:
How all the good you have is but a shadow,
I' the morning with you, and at night behind you,
Past and forgotten. How your vows are frosts
Fast for a night, and with the next sun gone:
How you are, being taken all together,
A mere confusion, and so dead a chaos,
That love cannot distinguish.
BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

I wash'd an Ethiope, who, for recompense,
Sully'd my name. And must I then be forced
To walk, to live, thus black! Must! must!—Fie!
He that can bear with "must," he cannot die.
MARSTON.

THE love of the youthful Shakspeare for the yeoman's blooming daughter flourished the more, the more it was fed by her sunny glances, and in these, he basked as often as he could find opportunity; but, at this period, his visits to the cottage were mostly late at night, when her father and the children were asleep in their beds. This arose from a cause which must here be described. He was now growing towards man's estate, and it often occurred to him, when he was in his own little chamber, fitted by himself with his own two or three books on a shelf—a chair for sitting—a little table for writing on—and a truckle bed for his lying,—that he ought to be doing of something for himself, and so save his poor parents the burthen of his provision. Such reflections would come upon him, when he had been wearing away the deep midnight with anxious study; and so one morning, having come to a resolution, he dressed himself with all neatness, and bent his steps towards Jemmy Catchpole's, whom he had heard was in want of some one, to copy papers and parchment and such things. He saw the little lawyer, after waiting a monstrous time in a low narrow chamber, whereof it was difficult to say whether the boards or the ceiling were in the dirtiest state, who, hearing of his errand, made him write as he dictated, at which he looked very intently, and though it was as fair a specimen of penmanship as might be seen any where, he found wonderful fault with it. However, the end of it was, Jemmy Catchpole offered to employ the youth, and for his services give him a knowledge of the law for the first year or so; and after that, should he have made any reasonable progress in his studies, he would pay him a handsome wage.

This offer was gladly accepted, for although he could gain no present profit by it, his sanguine nature saw in it a most bountiful prospect.

Behold him now, in that den of a place just alluded to, surrounded by musty parchments and mouldering papers, with scarce ever any other company than the rats and the spiders, sitting on a tottering stool at a worm-eaten desk, writing from the early morning till late into the evening, save at such times as he was allowed to get his meals, or to go of errands for his employer. It was about this time that he began to take especial note of the humours of men, wherever he could get sight of them; marking in his mind that distinctiveness in the individual, which made him differ from his fellows; and observing, with quite as much minuteness, the manner in which the professions of his acquaintances were in accordance or in opposition to their ways of living. By this peculiar curiousness of his, he took characters as a limner taketh portraits, having each feature so set down from the original, that he could carry such about with him wherever he went. This he had certain facilities of doing in his new occupation, as, finding him exceeding apt, the lawyer soon employed him as his assistant wherever he went, which brought him into every sort of company; for Jemmy Catchpole had every body's business on his hands, or, at least, he made many think so, and he bustled about from place to place, as if the world must needs stand still unless he gave it his help.

Such occasions, and the observations he drew from them, afforded the youthful Shakspeare some little amusement in the dulness of his present life. What books the lawyer had, related only to his own particular vocation. The papers and parchments were the dryest stuff that ever was read or written; even the very atmosphere of the chamber seemed to breathe of law; and as for Jemmy Catchpole, his talk was a mere patchwork of law phrases, that required considerable familiarity with legal instruments to make the slightest sense of. In fact, the little lawyer had so used himself to such a style in his writings and readings, that it was impossible for him to talk, think, or write, in any other. The tediousness of this was sometimes almost insupportable to the young poet, and he only made it tolerable by the occasional writing of some sweet ballad of his fair mistress, when he should be engrossing a sheet of parchment for his busy master.

But then, after all this weary labour, how famously did he enjoy his midnight meetings with the sprightly Anne Hathaway. There would they stand together, under the friendly shadow of the walnut-tree before the cottage, in such loving fashion as I never can sufficiently describe, till the stars disappeared, and the sun's crimson pennon began to peep above the eastern hills. Nothing in imagination can come at all nigh to the passionate earnestness of his manner at these times. It came to the ear of the enraptured maiden, in a resistless torrent of eloquence that swept down all denyings. There appeared a breathing fire in his words that made the air all around to glow with a delicious warmth; and his looks beamed with such exceeding brilliance, that to the enamoured damsel they made his beautiful clear countenance like unto the picture of some saint, clothed with a continual halo. It was not possible for the most scrupulous discreet creature to have resisted so earnest a wooer, therefore it cannot be considered in any way strange, that the fond nature of the blooming Anne should have acknowledged his complete influence. It so happened, that after passing the hours in such delicate pleasure as such a lover was likely to produce, on his taking leave of her, he sung the following words to a pleasant tune that had long been a favourite of his. Tae song was thus styled in a copy he gave to her soon after :—

WILLIAM SHAKSPEARE'S GOOD NIGHT TO HIS SOUL'S MISTRESS.

"Good night, sweet life! yet, dearest, say,
How can that night be good to me,
That drives me from my bliss away,
Whilst taking off mine eyes from thee?
Good night!—the hours so swift are fleeting,
We find no time to mark their flight;
And having known such joy in meeting,
'Tis hard to say—Good night! good night!
Good night, sweet life! ere daylight beams,
And sleep gives birth to hopes divine,
May I be present in thy dreams,
And bless'd as thou shalt be in mine.
Good night! yet still I fondly linger;
I go, but do not leave thy sight;
Though morning shews her rosy finger,
I murmur still—Good night! good night!"

This was the song, simple though it may be; but his impassioned manner of singing it, which clothed every word with unutterable passion, I cannot give.

"I tell thee what it is, friend Will," exclaimed a familiar voice from an open casement above them, so much to the astonishment of the lovers that they started from the affectionate closeness of their position on a sudden; "if thou wilt not come a wooing at decent hours, or dost again wake me out of my sleep with the singing of love-songs, I'll have none of thy company. And I tell thee what it is, Mistress Anne,—if thou allowest of such loud kissing, thou wilt alarm the whole country within a mile of thee!"

"Heart o' me, father, how you talk!" cried the blushing criminal. John Hathaway closed the casement and returned to his bed, chuckling like one who had just succeeded in playing off some exquisite pleasant jest.

About this period the youthful Shakpeare was ever meeting John a Combe, and though he could scarce be got to speak to any other person in the town, save on business, John a Combe never failed to accost the young poet whenever they met. It was evident each took pleasure in the other's society; for although Master Combe was marvellous bitter in his speech upon all occasions, he was ever betraying to the close observance of his companion, a kindness of nature which the latter could well appreciate. He suspected that beneath this covering of gall and wormwood the sweet honey of humanity lay in exhaustless heaps; and knowing of his history, and his former greatness of soul, he was exceeding curious to learn the secret cause that had made him apparently so changed a man. Once, when he met him, the usurer made him promise to call at his house immediately he had done his labours of the day, as he wished to see him on a matter of deep importance. William Shakspeare promised, and that evening, instead of going to his mistress, he was found seated in John a Combe's chamber, where one candle gave just sufficient light to make the cheerlessness of the place most conspicuous. The usurer sat before him, with that restless look and manner with which a man who has determined to do a thing which he likes not, prepares to set about it.

"I've heard thou art playing the lover—is't true?" inquired he, in his usual sharp voice.

"Most undeniable," replied the young poet with a smile.

"O' my life, I did not think thou hadst such marvellous lack of brains," observed the other. "Wouldst cater for thine own misery?—Wouldst build thy towering Babel to the skies, to end in the utter confusion of thy thoughts? Have more discretion."

"Indeed I find in it so sweet a happiness, I would not abandon it at any price," said his companion, with all the fervour of a true lover.

"Is not the poison sweetened to attract the fly?" exclaimed the usurer more earnestly. "I tell thee thou shouldst avoid the temptation as thou wouldst a pestilence. It will destroy thee, body and soul. It will madden thy brain and wither thy heart,—make thy blood a consuming fire, and thy life an intolerable wretchedness!"

"Truly I have no such fear," replied the youthful Shakspeare.

"When does youth fear when there is a fair prospect before it!" cried John a Combe. "What a desperate folly it is. Point out the gaping precipice within its path, it will go madly forward. Of a surety, nature might well wear a robe of motley, for she presideth over a goodly company of fools. I tell thee, boy, there is no such danger as that thou seemest so enamoured of; and if nothing else will turn thee from thy destruction, I will unfold to thee the story of mine own fearful experience of this blight upon humanity."

William Shakspeare listened in silence, for, as hath been said, he had a strange curiousness to know what his companion had promised.

"I require of thee, first of all, that thou declarest to none one word of the secret I am about to entrust to thee." The young poet readily made his assurance he would not repeat a syllable; and presently the usurer continued his narration in these words:—

"Perchance thou hast heard of one John a Combe, whose goodness of heart was the theme of all of his acquaintance. I was that John a Combe. I had such store of love in my breast that I scattered it far and wide, and yet it seemed to grow the greater the more it was so squandered. No matter what evil I might see, I regarded it only as the weeds in a corn field, surrounded by such bountiful provision of good that it was scarce worthy the observation of any person of a thankful nature. My youth was cherished with such pleasing feelings. My manhood flourished upon the same teeming soil. I sought to sow benefits broadcast wherever there was place and opportunity; and found, or fancied I found, the crop amply repay me for the labour. I made friends wherever I met faces. All men seemed to me my brothers; and every woman I looked upon as a domestic deity deserving honourable worship. At last I met with one man who regarded me as an enemy. I strove to win him to better feelings, and failed. He essayed to destroy me in honest battle—I disarmed him and went my way unhurt. He then tried to rob me of my life by treachery; but here he was both baffled and punished, whilst I remained as uninjured as at first. He was a demon—a fiend of hell let loose on earth.

"I had met with many women seeming in every way worthy of my love, and shewing such signs as proved I should have no great difficulty in the winning of their affections: but my soul was somewhat curious in the pursuit of female excellence. It must needs have a phœnix. It would not be satisfied with what appeared good—it strove to procure possession of the best. I sought for such an object, for a long time unavailingly. At last in a neighbouring town I met with one who seemed all I required. She was of a poor family, the daughter of a man supporting himself and her by the profits of a humble trade. She was fair—young—of gentle manners, and of a winning modest innocency. What more could be wanted? On further acquaintance her merits rose in greater conspicuousness, and the perfect simplicity of her disposition won on me more and more every day. Was not this a phœnix?— a phœnix that rose from the flames her brilliant beauty raised in my heart. I grew enamoured; and she with an admirable delicacy retired from my advances. I persevered, and saw in her some faint signs I was making way in her esteem. Still there was such sweet air of purest chastity in her every action, it kept me a worshipper at so respectful a distance, I could not believe my success to be in any certainty.

"What did I do upon this? I determined to take every opportunity of studying her nature, with the hope of so moulding it to my ideas of womanly excellence, I should, by possessing her, secure myself a life of such exceeding happiness the most blessed could have but little notion of. To say I loved her, methinks is scarce to say enough, yet of the mere outward shew of passion I afforded the world so little, none could have believed I had been so desperately enamoured. It was that nice sense of delicacy in her, and modest shrinking from familiar praise, that took me captive. To win her love I strove with all the earnestness of manhood flushed with its proudest energies. But how to win it was the question. I would not purchase it by gifts, for that suited not my humour. I would only have it to come as the price of her appreciation of my merit, for then I thought I could the better count on its sincerity and duration. With this fine fantasy of mine, I would not let her know I was in such good estate as I really was. I affected some humbleness of fortune, thinking by gaining her in such guise I should be sure that no alloy of selfishness could mingle with the pure sterling of her love.

"I took up my abode in her father's house to have the fullest means of completing my honest purpose. She seemed to grow under my hand like a flower of my own planting. She began to regard me with a softer tenderness. I doubled my assiduity, and she gradually warmed into a graceful fondness; yet in all that she did or said there was so exquisite an artlessness, I was more charmed than had she been a thousand times more affectionate without such simple colouring. I loved more and more. At last, the crowning of all my toil, I gained from her the much longed-for confession—the treasure of her regard was mine and mine alone. I did not betray myself even then, delighted as I was beyond all measure; but I resolved the next day to leave the house, return in my true character as speedily as I might, and, before all her acquaintance, wed her with such honourable ceremony as worth like hers deserved. I thought my bliss complete, and my gratitude to the author of it knew no bounds.

"I slept in a chamber directly under hers, and often as I lay in my bed have I enjoyed most exquisite sweet pleasure in hearing her gentle footsteps pass my door, and up the stairs to her sweet rest—to which, in consequence, as she told me, of her household labours, she was the last to retire of any in the house. That night thinking of my great happiness to come, I kept awake longer than had been customary with me; and all at once I marvelled I had not yet heard her light footfalls, for it was far beyond her usual time of coming up stairs. Another hour passed by and yet no sign of her coming. I began to get somewhat alarmed, as lovers will upon anything out of the ordinary in their mistress's behaviour. At last when I had nigh worked myself into a fever with imagining of all sorts of dangers that might have happened to her, to my infinite joy I heard her softly approaching my door. Almost at the same instant I heard other footsteps ascending with her. In the next moment I distinguished a slight whispering in a strange voice. Then two persons together proceeded past my door—together they ascended the stairs—together they entered her chamber—the door was locked—and I could then distinctly hear above me, mingled with her light footfall and gentle voice, the full deep tones and heavy step of a man.

"At this discovery I started up as though I had been bit by an adder—the bed shook under the fierce trembling of my limbs—my heart beat in my breast as a madman rushes against his prison bars—my veins seemed filled with flame, and my brain scorching with fire; and a hot blighting wind appeared so to fill the place around me, I breathed as though every breath would be my last. But this was but the beginning of my tortures. Had I possessed the power of moving I would have done a deed of just vengeance, which should have remained a monument of terror unto the end of time; but I was there like one chained, having no other senses but those of hearing and feeling. Talk of the sufferings of the damned, what were they to the agonies I endured. Lash me with scorpions—plunge me into everlasting fires—goad me with serpents' stings—strain every nerve and artery with pullies, racks and wheels—'tis but a mere ordinary aching in comparison. At last nature could hold out no longer, and all sensation left me.

"When I recovered consciousness, the sun was streaming in at my casement; but it was no sun for me. I was no more the man I had been twelve hours before, than is a withered bud a blooming flower. I was blind to all sense of good. A perpetual darkness took possession of mine eyes—my veins held a running poison—the sweet feelings of humanity had turned to a sourness that corroded their vessels—all my hopes were consumed to ashes, and scattered to the four winds; and all my belief in the existence of the worthiness of humanity burst like a bubble in the air, leaving no sign to tell that such a thing had ever appeared. Wherever I looked I spied the darkness of a sepulchre—wherever I moved I smelt the filth of a charnel. Villany was branded on every face. Craft made its dwelling in every habitation. I saw the world intent on my destruction. I declared war against the whole human race.

"I took counsel with myself, and determined before I left that hateful place to discover one thing. I had dressed myself in readiness to set about the fulfilment of my resolution, when who should make her appearance but the object of my late care and regard—my phœnix! my best among the excellent! Towards me she came looking as simple, innocent, pure, and artless as she had looked from the beginning. I managed by a desperate effort to keep me a calm countenance, though there raged so fierce a tempest within me as beggareth all description.

"She sat herself down as usual, and with her customary gentle kindliness commenced asking concerning of my health. I calmly drew a chair next to hers, quietly seated myself as near to her as I could—quickly seized one of her wrists in each hand, and with my face close to her own, looked into her eyes as though I would read there the deepest secret of her soul. She shrunk from my scrutiny with every sign of conscious guilt. I then poured out on her the pent-up flood of my contempt, indignation, and abhorrence; and she trembled in pallid shame. I saw she was humbled to the dust with fear, and rung from her reluctant lips the whole history of her infamy. It was a common case. An excess of vanity, disguised by matchless craft, made her seek to become above her natural station. She sought to be the envy of her companions, by wearing of such ornaments as they could not obtain. These she cared not to get honestly, though she employed an exhaustless stock of artifice to make it appear they were so acquired. The tempter was at hand, ready to take advantage of her evil-disposedness. A few trinkets and other pretty baubles, with a fair commodity of oaths and flatteries, completed the bargain. The price paid, she sold herself, body and soul. Still I stopped not here. I insisted on the name of her companion in iniquity. After a while she gave it. It was mine enemy.

"He had seen where I had stored up all my hopes—he had no-tired my infinite pains-taking to make my happiness complete—he had watched—eagerly—delightedly watched the progress of the enamoured game I was playing, till I had staked every thought and feeling on the issue; and then he came with his damnable base villany, and so cheated me, I not only lost what I had staked, but lost myself as well. At the mention of his name I flung her from me like a toad; and as the fear-struck wretch lay prostrate before me, I heaped on her guilty soul the abundant measure of my honest execrations. She hid her face in her hands, and writhed like a bruised worm; but I left her not till I had exhausted every term of infamy and scorn I had at my will. Doubtless, though the next hour she went about wearing of the same simple, artless, innocent countenance as first attracted me; and as token of her worthiness, exhibited to her envious companions the letters and verses of my writing, wherein I bestowed on her that estimable rare clothing with which true love delighteth to attire its deity:—and, I make no manner of question, hath since palmed herself off on others, as she strove to do with me, as the purest, kindest, and best among the most admirable of her sex.

"As for the villain who did me this intolerable wrong, I sought him in all places, but he managed to elude the strictness of my search. If there remain for me one glimpse of happiness in this world, it can only come when I shall toss his body to the ravens, and leave his bones a crumbling monument of matchless perfidy, to whiten in the blast. Bowed down, as I am, with the weight of those memories which crush my humanity to the dust, my arm seems nerved, and all my limbs clothed with a giant's power, whenever I see in my mind's eye the arrival of my day of vengeance. I know it will come. Nature hath been outraged beyond all previous example. The punishment shall be in proportion to the offence. The breath of life is kept within my miserable frame only by an unconquerable desire to execute this natural decree; and till that longed-for time shall come, the scorn, the detestation, the hatred, the contempt, the disgust, the loathing and abhorrence that bubbles from my heart, will fall, for want of being discharged upon its proper object, upon those who have the ill hap to come within my influence.

"Boy!" exclaimed John a Combe, in a voice scarce audible from the greatness of his emotions, "when I think of what I might have become, and behold what I am, my heart feels as if it would shiver in my breast. There are many who may still remember me in my better days, but I doubt they knew the happiness I had then in myself and my doings. From philanthropy to usury is a huge step; yet I took it at a bound. Mayhap I am mad—I have had cause enough for it—but I can assert of a certainty, I am—most miserable."

William Shakspeare had listened to the preceding narration with exceeding interest; but the last few words were spoken with such a touching earnestness, he was more deeply moved than ever he had been in his life before. He saw this was no case for common consolations—he therefore attempted nothing of the sort.

"Never breathe to me a word of woman's honourableness," continued the usurer, with increased earnestness. "This creature, that

I had worshipped with so pure a spirit, whose worthiness I exalted above all virtue, and whose excellence I so honoured, it outtopped every example of goodness, not only did me this inhuman wrong out of her own infinite baseness; but as soon as I had rid myself of her infamous society, she took to slandering me with the coarse, vile colouring of the blackest malice—thinking, by so doing, my testimony of her shame would not be believed. I alone had knowledge of her evil doing—the fear which guilt produces continually haunted her—and she strove to save her reputation by destroying mine. She gave out I had sought to use her dishonestly, so she would have none of me; and accused me of such horrible behaving as none but the degraded, debased thing she had made herself, could have conceived. Here then was I, by my abundant love of virtue, and prodigal generousness, in seeking to make others happy, stripped hopeless—and then daubed with the pitch of infamy! I have said nought of this matter hitherto, believing I might escape the outstretched finger, and the reviling eye, of the unjust world, by a strict secrecy. My pride would not allow of my offering one word in my own defence, convinced that men's minds have such an inclination for villany, they will readily entertain it, let it come in any shape. No where will there be found any sympathy for abused confidence, for the man that is deceived is looked upon as a poor weak fool, that should have had more wit than to have suffered such cozening.

" I felt convinced that every one around me were striving to get to a knowledge of my secret, that they might enjoy the pleasure of thinking ill of me, so I was beforehand with them—abused all, and kept all from the slightest approach to that familiarity which they desired should lead to contempt. But what a life is this I am living! and when I behold thy fresh young nature pursuing the same course which mine hath gone, have I not reason to fear it will come to a like dreadful ending? Boy! look at me, and pause in thy career. I have been as thou art now—a worshipper of fair appearances. I loved the goodly garnishing of the bright world, and would have rushed against a thousand levelled spears in defence of its integrity. Thou seest me here, decrepid in my prime, inwardly affected with a moral leprosy, that eateth my heart to the core—outwardly, one entire sore, that causeth me to shrink from the world as from a scorching fire. I am at strife with my fellows—I am at war with myself—the day bringeth no peace for me—the night no repose. Merciful God!" exclaimed the unhappy usurer, in his deep frenzy, clasping his hands together, with a wild look of agony and supplication. " Is there no peace for the guiltless?—Is there nought but perpetual torture for the doer of good? Tear not my heart-strings with so rude a grasp! I have wronged none. I have loved all. I have worshipped fervently each excellent evidence of thy perfect handiwork. Let not mine enemy prevail against me. He hath done me most intolerable injury. Pity for my undeserved sufferings! Justice against the villany that produced them! Mercy! help! vengeance!"

Shouting these last words in the most piercing tones, John a Combe tottered forward a few steps, and, before his young companion could reach the place where he was, fell exhausted upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Is this your manly service?
A devil scorns to do it.

MASSINGER.

O sacred innocence! that sweetly sleeps
On turtles' feathers, whilst a guilty conscience
Is a black register, wherein is writ
All our good deeds and bad—a perspective
That shews us hell.

WEBSTER.

Drink to-day, and drown all sorrow,
You shall, perhaps, not do it to-morrow;
Best while you have it use your breath;
There is no drinking after death.

BEN JONSON.

Now, whether it were providence, or luck,
Whether the keeper's or the stealer's buck,
There we had venison.

BISHOP CORBET.

"See that this plot of thine have a more profitable issue than thy preceding ones."

"It cannot fail, my lord, it is so cunningly devised."

"So thou saidst of the others, yet I reaped no advantage of them."

"That was owing to no fault of mine, believe me, but to circumstances which, as it was clean impossible they could be foreseen of the pierceingest wit, it is plain they could not have been prevented."

Thus spoke two of whom the reader hath already some acquaintance—to wit, the licentious noble and his villanous assistant; and they were sitting together in a small mean chamber of an obscure inn in the neighbourhood of Charlcote—the former, as usual, so closely wrapped up, as if he feared being recognized; and the other in finer feather than he had ever been in before, as though he was intent in playing some exceeding gallant part.

"I marvel, my lord, you should waste so much labour on so poor an object," observed the meaner villain. "Methinks you might have won a nobler prize at half the pains. Indeed, I have been credibly informed this Mabel is nothing better than a very mean person—a mere foundling—mayhap the chance offspring of vulgar parents—that hath now become a sort of humble servant to the good dame by whom she was discovered."

"Dost tell me this story, fellow!" exclaimed his companion, rising from his seat with most haughty indignant glances. "Why, where hath flown thy wits, that thou couldst credit so shallow a tale?—Foundling! o' my life, I would gladly give a thousand crowns to pick up such a foundling but once or twice in my life. Vulgar parentage! By this hand, I have seen her wear so regal an air with her, as Elizabeth, in her proudest mood, never came up to. Servant! Hast noted her look and move, and speak with that unrivalled dignity she possesseth, and talk so idly? 'Slife, thy brains are addled."

The gallant looked all humbleness. He knew it would be somewhat unprofitable to him to differ in opinion with his employer on such a matter; so he made no more ado than to express his entire disbelief of the story he had been told, and avow he had never entertained it from the first.

"I must say this plot seemeth to me a famous good one for the purpose," observed the other, as he was making for the door. "But, mark me, if that knave of thine lay but his sacrilegious finger on her, I'll cut him to shreds!"

"Be assured, my lord, every thing shall be done according to your noble wishes," replied his associate. Soon afterwards both mounted their horses at the door, the noble then started off in one direction, and the other, accompanied by the same ill-looking fellow, that had dealt William Shakspeare so fierce a blow in the park, at Charlcote, took a different road. These two rode towards Sir Thomas Lucy's house, in deep and earnest converse all the way; the former ever and anon breaking off his discourse by muttering the words "fellow," and "so my brains are addled!" in a manner which shewed he had taken huge offence at those expressions. In another hour they were seated with the justice in his favourite chamber, making famous cheer of his good ale; the gallant appearing to be a marvellous great person; and his fellow, dressed in a falconer's suit of green, played the part of the honest humble serving man, that his master, out of regard for his exceeding merit, sought to make happy. He spoke seldom, and then only to praise his good master, or say some respectful speech to his worship the justice. However, his companions left him but little opportunity for much talking, had he been so inclined; for what with his master's marvellous accounts of his influence at court, and the many noble persons he was held in such esteem of, they could refuse him nothing, and Sir Thomas's still more incredible accounts of his familiar acquaintance with these notable personages in their youth, and the famous tricks he and they had played together, there was but little room for a third party to bring in a word.

We must, however, leave these worthies for the present, and accompany the courteous reader to another chamber, wherein the the gentle Mabel was receiving a grave and somewhat severe lecture from Dame Lucy. The poor foundling looked pale and sad. She was striving to resign herself to the humility of her fortunes, but there was something in her nature that would not be content.

"I beseech you, sweet mistress, let me hear no more of the marriage," said she at last, in a manner pitiful enough to have moved any person. "This man I know to be one of those who assisted to carry me off, and the other his master was the mainspring of the whole villany."

"Did any ever hear of such presumption!" exclaimed the old dame, in a famous astonishment. "Doth not Sir Thomas declare that the gentleman hath been his good friend nigh upon this twenty year, and that the other, his chief falconer, he believes to be as honest a man as ever broke bread. Dost pretend to know more than the justice? I marvel at thy horrible impudency!"

"I cannot be mistaken, for they have given me but too good cause to hold them firmly in my remembrance," added the poor foundling.

"Here's ingratitude!" cried her ancient companion, seeming to be getting a little out of temper; "Here's obstinacy! Here's disobedience, and undutifulness to thy proper advisers. Art not ashamed to be setting thyself in opposition to thy betters, who have clothed thee, and fed thee, and given thee lodging, and made of thee a Christian? By my troth, I would not have believed such huge baseness was in the whole world."

"But I have no desire for marriage, an' it please you, good mistress," said Mabel, "methinks I am well enough as I am."

"How dost pretend to know anything of the sort," answered Dame Lucy, sharply. "Is not the justice the better judge! Hath he not said thou art ill off, and dost dare, in the face of it, to say thou art well enough? But I see it plain. Thou art hankering after those fine fellows who met thee at Kenilworth; and would sooner be the leman of a gay gallant than the wife of an honest man. But I will put a stop to thy villany straight. The justice hath declared thou art to marry, and to marry thou must speedily make up thy mind. I will see that thou art properly wedded with all convenient speed, and as earnest of my intentions, I will send thee the honest man who is to be thy husband. Prythee, take heed thou entertain him well."

Mabel saw her mistress leave the chamber, and sank into a seat with a mind nigh paralysed with apprehension. She had suspected, for some time, some plot was hatching by which she was to suffer, and she now saw its villanous shape and purpose. She perceived it was planned with such extreme subtlety, that it afforded scarce any chance of escape. Her thoughts were sinking into a very desperate hopelessness, when the door opened, and there entered the chamber, with a half-respectful, half-familiar look, and in an awkward clownish manner, the man that awhile since was making cheer with his master, and the justice. Mabel knew him at a glance, and in a moment sprung to her feet, eyeing him with a look of scorn and detestation that appeared to discompose him somewhat. There was scarce a bolder villain in existence, yet it was evident he felt not quite at his ease before the flashing glances of the poor foundling. He seated himself on a chair, holding his hat before him with his knees close together; and presently shifted his position, and then again changed it. Neither had spoke by word of mouth; but the looks of Mabel seemed to have the searchingest language that ever was said or written, and the villain read it, understood it, and felt it. At last he commenced speaking,—"His worship hath had such goodness as to——"

"Wretch!" exclaimed Mabel, interrupting him in a deep low voice, in which utter contempt seemed to breathe its most humiliating spirit; and then advancing towards him two or three steps in all the haughty dignity of virtue, continued with an eloquence of look and gesture which exceedeth all powers of description, to address him thus:—"The spawn of the toad hath a name, the slough of the adder may be called something; but what art thou, thou monster of baseness, for whom language hath no fit title? Art a man? Manhood spits at thee! Art a beast? The most bestial thing that crawls, knoweth nothing of the vile office thou hast undertaken. Avaunt, thou outrage upon nature! Away, thou shame on humanity! Go, hide thee, if hiding thou canst find; for if thou couldst crawl within the deepest bowels of the earth, the earth would sicken at thy touch, and cast thee up—the sea would raise her gorge at thee—the mountains heave at thy approach—and all the elements of matter shrink from thy neighbourhood, as from an abomination too gross to be endured!"

The man winced under this address, as if every word of it had been a goad that touched him to the quick. His dark scowling eyes glanced restlessly about, he changed colour several times, and looked in that peculiar expression of indecision that betokeneth a state of mind in which a person knoweth not what to do with himself, though he would be glad to be any where but where he was.

"What desperate demon put thee on this mischief?" continued Mabel, in the same force of language and manner. "Canst seek such detestable employment and live? Hast no sense of shame? No fear of punishment? No dread of an hereafter? Look at what thou art about to do. Hold it before thy gaze unshrinkingly, if thou canst. Doth not thy soul shrink in disgust at entering upon such loathsomeness? Man! If thou hast not parted with every tittle of the decent pride of nature, spurn the outrageous infamy thou wouldst thrust thyself into. Get thee to thy employer, and tell him thou dost abhor such inhuman villany, or thou art baser than a dog. Strive to earn his filthy wages, and thou wilt be hunted through the world like some foul fruit of monstrous practices, all nature riseth to destroy from very shame."

The villain evidently trembled, and the big drops starting on his wrinkled forehead shewed how deeply he was moved.

"Rememberest thou, thou hadst once a mother?" added the foundling, in a deeper and more subduing tone: "think of her, friendless as I am. How wouldst thou regard the man who suffered himself to become the tool of a villanous base traitor, to secure his doing her such foul wrong as honesty stands aghast to contemplate? Wouldst not be ready to tear his heart from his breast, and trample it in the nighest dunghill, to rot with its kindred filth? Canst behold this vileness in another and not see it in thyself? Thou art the tool for compassing this mischief, and I the guiltless object at which 'tis aimed. If I have done thee any wrong, I will do thee all possible reparation. If I have given thee any offence, I will endure any corresponding punishment. I charge thee, say in what I have injured thee, that thou shouldst pursue me with so unnatural a hatred!"

"Nay, sweet mistress, I have never received ill at your hands," replied the man with a faltering voice, and a manner thoroughly ashamed. "And if I in any way assist in doing of you an injury, may I be hanged on the highest gibbet that can be found." So saying he hurried out of the chamber so completely chap-fallen as no villain had ever been before. He immediately sought his master, and found him alone.

"Ask of me to stab, to poison, or to rob, and I care not to refuse," exclaimed he. "But if I am caught within looking or talking distance of that wench again, I will eat myself by handfuls. 'Slight! her words and glances have so scourged me, I would sooner have took the whipping-post the longest day o' the year, than have endured a tithe of such punishment."

"Why, thou ape, thou beast, thou fool, thou pestilent knave and coward! what dost mean by this?" cried his master in as great rage as astonishment. "Wouldst spoil the goodliest plot that ever was devised; and mar the making of our fortunes when we are sure of success?"

"Truly, I care not if I do," said the man doggedly. "But I will be no mean for the doing of her any mischief. I will assist thee in any decent villany, but if ever I meddle with her again, I'll forswear living."

It was in vain that the other tried by promises and then by threats to turn his companion's resolution; and the result was, Mabel was left at peace till some more willing agent could be found.

In the meanwhile the passion of the youthful Shakspeare for the yeoman's blooming daughter continued to develop itself with increased fervour, despite of the usurer's warning; and John Hathaway with his own notions of the matter, at last on one of his usual evening visits, bluntly asked him how he should like his fair mistress for a wife; whereupon, as might be expected, the young lover answered nought in this world would make him so happy. Then the father gravely inquired into his means of supporting a wife, at which his companion looked the gravest of the two, and acknowledged that all he had was the wage he received from Master Catchpole, which scarce sufficed to keep him in shoe leather; and at that the yeoman looked monstrous concerned, and began to preach a notable fine homily on the necessity of marrying with sufficient provision, to all of which the young poet had not a word of reply; but sat in a very desperate unhappiness, fully convinced every hope of gaining his dear mistress was at an end.

"I tell thee what it is, friend Will," said John Hathaway, after regarding his companion's doleful visage till he found he could no longer disguise the sly pleasure he was himself enjoying all the time, "Keep thy heart above thy girdle, I prythee. I and thy honest father settled the matter yester-eve, over a full tankard. Thou shalt be married at Lammas, and shalt lack nothing for thy particular comfort I can procure thee. A fair good night to thee, son Will." Before the delighted lover could recover from his exceeding astonishment at this welcome intelligence, his intended father-in-law, mayhap the most pleased of the two, had made his way to his bedchamber.

Every hour of the intervening time went most joyfully with the youthful Shakspeare. Even the musty parchments and dull law writings took a pleasant countenance at this period, and he laboured so diligently and so much to the satisfaction of his master, with whom he had become in famous esteem for his cleverness at his duties, that he, hearing of his coming marriage, promised him a week's holiday previous to his wedding-day, that he might the better employ himself in the necessary preparations, and a week after his nuptials, that he might have sufficient space to enjoy himself to his heart's content. But the little lawyer was a marvellous shrewd person. He suspected did he not get rid of his clerk at such a time, he would be marring of every thing he put his hand to, by thinking of other matters.

The week previous to the wedding had arrived, and the young lover was in such a state of happy expectation as lovers at such a time only can know. His cheerful free humour had made him an especial favourite of the young men of his own age, who could claim with him any sort of acquaintance, and now more than ever his heart was open to every appearance of sociality. His approaching marriage became known over the town, and this led many to ask him to partake with him a friendly draught, that they might wish him all manner of happiness, the which he could not, without an unbecoming discourtesy, refuse, consequently, when he was not in company with his dear mistress, of whom, by reason of her being in almost constant occupation preparing for this great festival of her life, he saw only for a brief space each day, he was engaged in social reveling with his friends. Perchance some of these, being of an idle turn, and of somewhat unbridled inclinations, were not the very properest companions he should have chosen, but he knew of nought to their particular disadvantages, and their exceeding friendliness towards him in his present humour made him readily embrace any frolic they wished him to share in. They proposed that to make the wedding feast the more perfect, they should go together over night and kill a deer, and as this was regarded by persons of his condition at that period as a mere customary youthful frolic, he readily promised to be of the party.

It chanced to happen that afternoon, as they were standing together at the inn door, who should come by but Oliver Dumps the constable, having as his prisoners no less important personages than Sir Nathaniel, the curate, and Stripes, the schoolmaster. The cause of which was, that these two had become such inveterate offenders in the way of drunkenness, and Oliver was so desirous of shewing himself the queen's proper officer, that he had at last come to the determination of putting them both in the stocks; and to the stocks, which lay convenient to the inn in the market-place, the constable was bringing them, making the dolefulest lamentation by the way, of the horrid wickedness of the world that had forced him so to exercise his authority. It was amusing enough of all conscience to the throng of children and idlers that so novel an incident had brought together, to note the manner in which the two offenders bore themselves as they were carried along. The schoolmaster hung his head as if he felt a little ashamed of his situation, but the curate assumed an air of dignity so monstrously ridiculous, none could look on it in any seriousness. Presently the board was opened, their legs placed in the holes, and having had it fastened down on them with a strong padlock, they were left to their own reflections.

Sir Nathaniel seated on a low stool, with his fat legs stuck fast in the board, seemed not at all comfortable; and Stripes, hanging of his head, with his thin shanks dangling through the holes, looked amazing sheepish. The curate glanced feelingly at the schoolmaster, and the schoolmaster turned a similar look of suffering at the curate.

"Hard lying—ey, Ticklebreech?" exclaimed Sir Nathaniel, in a low voice.

"Monstrous!" replied Stripes, in as sad a tone as ever was heard. It was evident the curate was not well pleased with his seat, for he turned on one side and then on the other, and then supported himself with his hands behind, with a visage as woeful as drunken man ever wore.

"I would these pestilent stocks had been a thousand miles away, and be hanged to 'em!" cried the uncomfortable Sir Nathaniel, with an earnestness that bespoke his sincerity.

"I'faith so would I, an' it please your reverence!" answered the pedagogue, with more than ordinary fervour. As the minutes passed neither appeared to grow a whit more satisfied with his situation. The crimson face of the one every moment took a deeper hue, and the lanthorn jaws of the other assumed an increasing elongation.

"Too much drinking's a villanous bad thing, Pedagogus!" said the curate, with a notable emphasis that shewed how convinced he was of the truth of his assertion.

"Horrible!" replied Stripes, evidently in a like assurance.

"I marvel a man should be so huge an ass as to be ever addling his brains with abominable filthy liquor," continued his companion. "For mine own part, I would such vile stuff was put clean out o' the land. I hate it. But 'tis all the fault of those base, thorough-going rogues of tapsters, who seduce one's innocence; and then, when the draughts have become in any number, straightway take to asking for payment. What infamous villany!"

"Marvellous, o' my word!" exclaimed the other.

"Well, an' they catch me drinking any more of their abominable potations, I'll turn hermit," observed Sir Nathaniel, in a greater earnestness. "'Sprecious! there is no honesty in swallowing anything of the sort. Ale is against all Christian doctrine, and wine is scarce fit for a Jew. Not a drop of such deceitful base wash shall pollute my throat. Wilt taste any more on't, Ticklebreech?"

"Never! an' it please your reverence," cried the schoolmaster, monstrous determinedly. The whole of this little scene of reformation had been heard and witnessed by the youthful Shakspeare and his companions, to their exceeding amusement; and soon after, one of the former came before the topers, carrying of an ale-can frothing over at the top.

"Thinking thou cannot help being terribly athirst sitting there so uncomfortably, I have brought thee a draught of right good liquor," said he, very carefully laying down the can within a short distance of them, and then returning to his companions.

"I thank thee, boy—I thank thee; my tongue cleaveth to my mouth, I am so dry," replied the curate, eagerly stretching out his arm towards the vessel; but it was beyond his reach: thereupon he earnestly moved his companion to bring it him: and Stripes, manifestly no less eagerly, stretched out his whole length of limb, but could only get within an inch of it.

"Now, Pedagogus!" cried his companion, pushing the other with all his might over the stocks, "prythee send thy hand a little farther. Stretch away, Ticklebreech! Thou hast it within a hair's breadth; now give it a fair grasp and 'tis ours." But it was all labour in vain; Stripes stretched and Sir Nathaniel pushed with equal desire; but all their united exertions only succeeded in bringing the schoolmaster's fingers to touch the tantalising ale-can; and at last, Stripes roared out he could endure no more squeezing, for his body was pressed against the edge of the board with a force that threatened to cut him in two. Whilst both were lamenting the hardness of their fortune, up came another of the young men, and pushed the can a little nearer and went his way. The schoolmaster in a moment had it in his careful hold, but the other greedily snatched it out of his hand, claiming the first draught as due to his superiority, and quickly raised it to his lips. He had not swallowed more than a mouthful or two when he dashed down the can, spluttered out what he was swallowing, and made one of the most dissatisfied countenances ever seen, to the exceeding astonishment of his companion and the infinite delight of the spectators. The can, instead of "right good liquor," contained nothing better than a mess of soap-suds, fetched by the merry knave who offered it, from a tub in which the maids of the inn were washing the household linen.

Whilst the enraged curate was making of all manner of strange forbidding grimaces, and abusing those who had put so unpalatable a jest on him in most outrageous choleric terms, there rode up to him a very sedate old gentleman, with others in his company, who regarded Sir Nathaniel and his companion with a singular severe scrutiny. In consequence of continued complaints made by divers of the worthy burgesses of Stratford, concerning of the unseemly behaviour of their parson and schoolmaster, the bishop of that diocese had determined to look into their conduct, and had arrived in the town with his retinue, where, after inquiring for the curate, he had been directed to the stocks. The result of this visit was, both Sir Nathaniel and Stripes were a very short time after dismissed from their offices, and driven out of the place they had so long disgraced by their presence.

The moon was shining clearly in the starry sky, when William Shakspeare, armed with John Hathaway's gun, and accompanied by three or four of his associates to help to carry the game, crept cautiously through the shrubberies that skirted the park, where he knew deer in plenty were to be found. Hitherto all his shooting had been directed against small birds and coneys, but now he looked for nobler spoil. Having made a long circuit to avoid being noticed, he came to a grove of thick trees—his companions keeping a little behind him—where, after he had advanced stealthily along for about a hundred yards, he beheld a goodly company of fallow deer, some lying, some standing, and most of them cropping the herbage at the edge of the grove, where the open pasture sweeps up to the trees. Taking the wind in his face, the young deer-stealer crept from tree to tree, pausing behind each to mark if the game was disturbed, then proceeding noiselessly in the same direction. He never remembered having felt such excitement—he could scarce breathe, he was so moved. He had singled out the tallest buck of the herd, that stood like a sentinel, a little nigher to him than the rest, seeming to sniff the air, and stamping with his foot as if he suspected some danger, and knew not whence it was coming. William Shakspeare crouched behind the trunk of a neighbouring tree, as still as a stone, afraid that the very beating of his heart would betray him. His companions laid themselves down in the grass as soon as they caught sight of the deer. He peeped from behind his hiding place, and beheld the buck quietly cropping the herbage with his back towards him. He then looked at his gun, and saw every thing was as it should be. His great anxiety now was to reach an old decayed stump—the ruin of what had once been the finest of the whole grove—which lay between him and his game. He issued from his hiding place as if his life depended on the quietness of his footsteps, and to his wondrous satisfaction succeeded in gaining the desired place without being discovered. Yet it was manifest the buck was in some way alarmed, for the young deer-stealer had scarce concealed himself when he turned sharply round, looking now in this direction and now in that, and stamping with more violence than before. The stump was completely open from the direction in which the youthful Shakspeare approached it; and inside were seats all round, for it was so large it would accommodate many; just under the bench a hole had been gnawed or broken away, and to this he cautiously raised his head as he lay his full length on the ground; then lifted he the barrel of his gun, and as the deer was glancing suspiciously in the direction of his concealment, he took a fair aim at his open breast and fired. The whole herd disappeared in a moment.

"Bravo, Will!" cried one of his companions, hastily running up to the spot, "thou hast killed the delicatest bit of venison I have seen this many a day."

Sure enough, the buck lay at a little distance from where he stood awhile since, shot through the heart. Overjoyed at their success, they bound his four legs together, intending to carry him away on a long thick staff they had brought with them.

"Run! Will, run! Here be the keepers!" all at once shouted another of them; and on the instant, as if they had wings to their legs, every one ran in different directions. The young Shakspeare caught up his gun to follow their example, without loss of time, but he found himself in the grasp of two stout fellows, with whom he soon saw it was useless struggling. These were the two sons of Sampson, the gamekeeper, who, with their father, had been watching from behind the trees the whole scene; and not caring to pursue the others, they pounced upon the unlucky deer-stealer in the very act of committing his offence. Sampson carried the slain deer and the gun, and his sons bore their prisoner to the lodge at Daisy Hill. They abused him somewhat at first, but he managed to gain on their good will as they proceeded; and when they arrived at the place where they intended confining him till they could take him before the justice at a proper hour in the morning, the father ordered a tankard of ale to refresh himself withal.

Who should bring it in but his fair acquaintance, Kate, the gamekeeper's pretty niece, whom he had met many times since he first had sight of her when she waited on him at Sir Thomas Lucy's. She was famously surprised, I doubt not, at beholding him there, and more so when she learned what occasion brought him; but she had the wit not so much as to recognise him before her uncle and cousins. As for the culprit, as he believed his punishment would be but trifling, the offence was generally considered so slight, he took the matter very pleasantly, and so amused his captors by his merry jests and his excellent famous singing, that they ordered jug after jug of ale, and sung their songs and made their jests, and swore he was the drollest knave they ever came anigh. Each of these men drank without stint, and Kate seemed to take care they should have as much as they could fancy: but their prisoner sipped sparingly, and the result was, in two or three hours after his capture, Sampson and his two sons were snoring in their chairs, and their prisoner was conveyed out of the chamber by his kind confederate.

I doubt though she would have shown him any such good service had she known he was to be married that very day, for she gave him no lack of signs she was more than ordinary fond of him. What passed between them the few minutes she detained him in the kitchen, hath never been correctly ascertained, therefore I cannot describe it to the courteous reader; but at the last moment of it she helped him to put the slain deer, there lying, to hang by his gun, over his shoulder; then she opened the door for him—and then he made the best of his way homewards.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Your master is to be married to-day?
Else all this rosemary is lost.
MIDDLETON.

Come strew apace. Lord! shall I never live
To walke to church on flowers? O 'tis fine
To see a bride trip it to church so lightly,
As if her new choppines would scorn to brush
A silly flower.
BARRY.

A parliament member, a justice of peace,
At home a poor scarecrowe, in London an asse.
SHAKSPEARE.

Off my painted honour!
Whilst with vain hopes our faculties we tire,
We seem to sweat in ice, and freeze in fire.
WEBSTER.

"O' MY Christian conscience, the monstrousness of this world passeth belief!" exclaimed Oliver Dumps, in his miserablest manner, as he flung himself into a seat in the chimney corner of the widow Pippins's comfortable kitchen—a place he seemed more partial to than any other in all Stratford.

"Why, what's i' the wind now, master constable?" inquired the laughing widow, as she brought her visitor his customary tankard, dressed more gaily than she had been seen for many years.

The melancholy Dumps looked up to her jolly features and sighed again. "'Tis a villanous world, that's the truth on't," said he, shaking his head very woefully.

"Villanous fiddlestick!" replied his merry companion. "By my fackings, the world be a right pleasant world, and is as full of delectable jests as world can be."

"Only think of young Will Shakspeare taking to deer stealing," observed the constable, gravely.

"Who? Will Shakspeare!" cried the widow, with a look of exceeding astonishment.

"Taken by the keepers in the very fact," replied Oliver Dumps. "Conveyed by them to the lodge at Daisy Hill, for the night. Made his escape in a most unaccountable manner, carrying off the deer he had slain, and the gun he had done it with. Sir Thomas Lucy hath issued a warrant for his apprehension, I have it to execute on him without delay; and hearing he is at John Hathaway's cottage, about to be married, am going there to carry him before his worship."

"Tilly vally! thou art jesting, master constable," exclaimed the other, "Will Shakspeare is not like to do any thing of the sort, I will be bound for it."

The queen's proper officer looked into his pouch, took out a folded piece of paper, and gave into her hands.

"That's the warrant," said he.

"An honest neighbour, that is now in my parlour, shall read it to me, seeing I cannot read a word of it myself," answered the widow Pippins; "and as I am going to John Hathaway's as soon I have got on my hat and muffler, if thou wilt wait a brief while, we will walk together." The constable promised to wait any reasonable time, for in truth he was well pleased to have her company, he, as many shrewdly imagined, having long been seeking to be her sixth husband; and thereupon the widow went to get the warrant explained to her.

A short time before this took place, a procession moved from the yeoman's cottage, in the direction of the church, which, methinks, deserveth here to be set down. First rode an old churl, blowing of such a peal on his bagpipes as if he was determined to expend his wind as quickly as he could, his long pipes and his cap decked with rosemary—then followed a merry company of lusty lads and bold bachelors of the neighbourhood, two and two, in their holiday jerkins, every one clean trussed, with a blue buckram bride lace upon a branch of rosemary, upon his left arm, on horses of all sorts and colours; William Shakspeare, the bridegroom, riding at their head in a new suit of frolic green, gaily decked with ribbons, with a branch of rosemary at his cap, and a true love posey at his breast; and on each side rode a bridesman, in tawny worsted jackets, straw hats on their heads with a steeple crown, and harvest gloves on their hands, similarly appointed with ribbons, rosemary, and posies. All the way he went, the bridegroom pulled off his cap courteously to the spectators, who, seeing so gallant a youth, could not help loudly greeting him with their good wishes.

Then came a company of Morris-dancers on foot, jingling it very prettily, with a most moving accompaniment of pipe and tabour. After them, six fair maidens in fair white court-pies and orange tawny kirtles, garlanded with wreaths of wheat, finely gilded, on their heads, and casting of flowers, by handfuls, out of small wicker baskets, gaily decked for the occasion. Then came the two bridemaids, most daintily tired, carrying before them each a large spice cake, followed by the bride's brother, a fair boy, carrying himself very bravely, choicely apparelled, bearing the parcel-gilt bride-cup, full of sweet ippocras, with a goodly branch of rosemary gilded and hung about with ribbons of all colours streaming in the wind; next came Anne Hathaway, the blushing blooming bride—her apparelling of appropriate whiteness, rarely garnished with ribbons and flowers, her hair curiously combed and plaited, and crowned with a garland of white roses—answering very gracefully the hearty salutations of her neighbours. On each side of her walked a fair boy, with bride laces and rosemary tied about his silken sleeves. After these, several musicians, with flutes, sackbuts, and other delicate instruments, made excellent music. Then rode the father of the bride, between the father and mother of the bridegroom, in their holiday garments, with no lack of proper garnishing; and, lastly, came the friends invited to the bride-ale, also wearing of their best suits, decorated with bride laces and rosemary.

In this order they reached the church at a slow pace, where the priest soon did his office for them; the bride-cup was then emptied by the company to the health and happiness of the new-married folks; and they returned in much the same fashion as they went, save that the bride rode on a pillion behind the bridegroom. John Hathaway's dwelling would scarce hold the guests; but they managed to accommodate themselves pretty well, for every room was thrown open, filled with a most bountiful provision of things for convenience and honest cheer, beside which there lay the orchard, the paddock, and the garden, for any that chose out-of-door pastime. The revels that followed exceed description—all sorts of games were going on in every direction—here a blind harper singing of ballads to a well-pleased audience, of all ages—there sundry young people, sitting in a circle with one in the midst, playing at hunt the slipper—another set at barley break—a third at a dance—the old, the young, the middle-aged, maidens and bachelors, husbands, wives, widows, and widowers, striving all they could to enjoy the pleasant humour of the hour.

Among the company were many of the courteous reader's old acquaintances; for in the principal chamber were Master Alderman Malmsey, and his neighbour Master Alderman Dowlas, like marvellous proper husbands as they were, attending on their still comely good-humoured wives—there was the widow Pippins, with a famous laughing countenance, that seemed to savour of a jest—there was honest John Shakspeare, and his matronly sweet wife, looking such satisfaction as 'tis impossible to describe—there was the manly yeoman, going about with his sly pleasantry, more manifest than ever, as he looked to see all were enjoying themselves to their heart's content—there was the blooming bride, and there the gallant bridegroom, in exquisite content with themselves and the whole world; and with these were also a many others, whose names I have forgotten. Still one more requireth my notice, and he was no other than Oliver Dumps, who sat in a corner, looking monstrous miserable, though each of the prettiest women was ever coming to him with all manner of delicacies, pressing him to partake of them, and smiling on him as she smiled on no one else in the room. But the more good cheer he made, the more miserable he looked. In fact, he was not at all at his ease. He wished to prove himself the queen's proper officer, without favour of any person, and yet he liked not interrupting the mirth of so bountiful a company.

It appeared as if there was some conspiracy among the women—doubtless set on by the merry widow, who seemed very busy amongst them, whispering, laughing, and pointing to the constable—for they would not allow him to remain by himself a moment, and kept insisting so winningly on his drinking the delicious draughts they brought, that he found he could do nothing, save, with a pitiful sighing, the performing of their requests. At last, with a sudden great effort, he broke from a circle of them, and gravely walked up to the bridegroom. To the marvel of the greater number of the guests, he claimed William Shakspeare as his prisoner, and commanded him to accompany him on the instant to his worship the justice.

"Eh! what dost say?" exclaimed John Hathaway, advancing hurriedly, with divers others, there present, to know the meaning of such strange behaviour.

"Deer stealing!" hiccuped the constable, evidently with his senses somewhat confused by the many draughts of strong wine he had been forced to swallow, yet holding himself up with what he considered to be the true dignity of the queen's proper officer.

"Nay, it cannot be, worthy Master Dumps," said Mistress Malmsey, coaxingly, on one side of him.

"'Tis a mistake, depend on't, sweet sir," added Mistress Dowlas, in an equally insinuating manner.

"Don't believe in anything of the sort, good Oliver," said one of the buxom bridemaids, pulling him affectionately by the arm.

"'Tis impossible so sensible a person as you are can give ear to so incredible a story," said another, taking a like pretty liberty with his other elbow. Oliver Dumps heard all these seducing expressions, and glanced from one to the other of the bewitching aspects of the speakers, with a monstrous struggling in his breast, and then with a becoming gravity, as he thought, took a paper from his pouch.

"Here's the warrant," answered he. John Hathaway received the paper from him, unfolded it, and commenced, in an exceeding droll manner, reading a ballad there printed, which was famous popular at the time, beginning—

"Alas, my love! you do me wrong,
To cast me off discourteously;
And I have loved you so long,
Delighting in your company.
Greensleeves was all my joy,
Greensleeves was my delight,
Greensleeves was my hart of gold,
And who but Lady Greensleeves?"

Oliver Dumps looked quite confounded, for he saw the jest that the merry widow had played upon him. The laughing and joking of those around him he took as pleasantly as he could, which in sooth was rather of a miserable sort—for he liked not confessing how he had been tricked; and the end of it was, the queen's proper officer allowed himself to join in the festivity of the day, as regardless of warrants and justices, as though he intended to play the constable no more. However, the affair of the deer-stealing went not off so quietly. Sir Thomas Lucy when he heard of it was in a terrible rage, and when he found the offender was not brought before him, he waxed more wroth than before. Other warrants were issued, and other constables employed, and the next morning the young deer-stealer was dragged into the justice-room, followed by such of his friends who had gained knowledge of his capture. The news, however, soon spread, and occasioned a notable commotion.

Nothing could exceed the astonishment of Jemmy Catchpole when he beheld his clerk brought before him in custody on such a charge; but being a shrewd man, he did not so much as recognize him. The justice entered into the charge with much the same formalities as had been exhibited by him and his attendants on a previous occasion—abusing of the prisoner with great bitterness, and allowing of none to say a word in his defence. The evidence of the keepers proved the offence beyond all contradiction, and when Sir Thomas demanded of the offender to give up the names of all those who were participating with him in the offence, and the latter would not tell the name of so much as one person, the justice broke out in such a passion, there never was the like. This the prisoner endured with a composure which exasperated the other the more, as it seemed so like holding him in contempt, and setting his authority at nought. He threatened him with the pillory, the whipping-post, and even the gibbet, but still William Shakspeare was not to be got to betray his companions. He smiled at the threats, and, with a fearless aspect, confessed he alone had committed the offence, and that he was ready to receive the punishment.

The constables, keepers, and serving men, looked awe-struck at what they considered to be the prisoner's horrible impudency, in so behaving before so great a man as his worship; and the poor justice seemed scarce in his right senses, he spoke so fast, and in so tearing a passion—at last, swearing it was a great pity he could not hang so abominable a villain, he got from the little lawyer the fullest punishment, provided by the statute of Elizabeth for such offences, which was the infliction of a fine, treble the value of the venison, an imprisonment for three months in the county gaol, and security for good behaviour for seven years; to the which he presently sentenced the offender. The youthful Shakspeare cared only for the imprisoning part of his sentence, as he felt it hard to be separated from his wife, and he scarce married to her; but he could not allow himself to say anything in mitigation of punishment, although his father and father-in-law did so for him; and the latter offered to pay the fine, and the two aldermen, his father's old friends, came forward as his security; nevertheless, his worship, so far from according with what was required, abused the parties heartily for saying ought of the matter, and bade them out of his doors straight, or they should all to prison together.

There were few persons who heard of the sentence, but were famously indignant a mere youthful frolic should meet with such heavy punishment, and many of the prisoner's companions swore he should never to prison if they could prevent it. Never had there been such a ferment in Stratford before. All abused Sir Thomas Lucy for his unwarrantable behaviour, and unreasonable severity; and both men and women took it as monstrous so young a couple should be thrust asunder for so trifling a cause. For all this the youthful Shakspeare, gyved like a felon, and guarded by two constables, was sent off to Warwick jail. No one seemed in any way surprised when intelligence was bruited abroad that they had scarce got a mile from Charlcote, when the constables were set upon and soundly cudgelled, and the prisoner carried off in triumph, by sundry unknown persons with blackened faces. Certes, such was the case. The young husband had been rescued by divers of his companions, relieved of his fetters, and brought back to his distressed wife.

It is not to be expected that a young man of any spirit would sit down and tamely suffer the insults that had been heaped upon him by this shallow-pated justice. William Shakspeare had committed the offence, it is true. He never denied it, and was ready to endure any fitting punishment; but the abuse and the gyves were the gratuitous insolence of power, desirous of insulting the weak; and, smarting under a sense of wrong, the young poet penned a bitter ballad against the old knight, and a mad-cap companion fixed it on the justice's park gates. Sir Thomas was one of the first that spied it; and the excessive rage it put him into, was as ludicrous a thing as can be conceived. He grew pale and red in a breath—stormed till he was hoarse, and called about him his little army of constables, game-keepers, and serving-men, questioned them as to who had dared to commit so unparalleled an indignity, and abused the horror-struck varlets all round because none could give him the slightest information on the subject. This ballad which among other offensive things, bore a burthen to it with a play upon his name, by no means the delicatest piece of jesting in the world, coming so quickly after the drubbing of his officers, to one of so tender a skin in such matters, seemed like enough to throw him into a fever.

His dignity, however, was fated to get still harder rubs. He issued warrant after warrant for the apprehension of the escaped deer-stealer, in a perfect phrensy of passion to hear he was still at large; and sent constables with them in all directions, with strict orders to carry him to prison dead or alive; but flung himself in such desperate rages when he heard the fruitlessness of their travail, that the poor constables cared not to go near him. Oliver Dumps had received a significant hint from the merry widow, that if ever he laid a hand on Will Shakspeare, she would have none of him for a sixth husband, therefore, it cannot be in any way strange he never could find the escaped prisoner searched he ever so. As for the other constables, one had incautiously made known his errand, and boasted at the blacksmith's that he would find Will Shakspeare before the day was over; and about an hour afterwards the unhappy officer found himself dragged through the horse-pond, with an intimation when allowed to get away half drowned, that if caught again under similar circumstances, he would not escape without hanging. This, together with the intemperate behaviour of the justice, operated with wonderful effect upon the whole body, and they unanimously adopted the opinion the offender had left the country.

Some time after these occurrences his worship gained intelligence that young Shakspeare had been all the while residing at the cottage of his father-in-law, and moreover that he was the very infamous base caitiff who had penned the bitter ballad that had been stuck upon his gates. This was adding fuel to the flame. The justice was in such a monstrous fire of indignation that he hardly knew what to set about. The unlucky constables were ordered to attend him instantly, and upon these he poured out the violent rage that was brimming over in him. They declared their conviction the escaped prisoner had gone from those parts altogether—nay, one confidently asserted a brother of his had seen him in London selling oysters, and another was as ready to swear he had been met with by a cousin of his on a pie-bald horse within a mile or so of Oxford. His worship was puzzled, and the more puzzled his worship appeared, the more confident did the constables become in their assertions. At last he ordered them to accompany him, and then started off in the midst of them, on the road to the yeoman's cottage.

William Shakspeare was busily engaged with a party of farm labourers in putting up a hay-rick in his father-in-law's paddock, when one of the children came running in all haste to say his worship was approaching the house with a great company of men—in an instant he was covered up in the hay as snugly as possible, and his companions, carelessly singing, continued their work lifting up the new hay to the top of the rick and there spreading it smooth and even. Presently the expected party made their appearance. Sir Thomas, in a terrible anxiety to find the culprit, and the constables quite as anxious he should not be found.

"Dost know anything of one William Shakspeare, fellow?" inquired the knight authoritatively, of a freckled-faced knave, lame of a leg. The latter gazed with open mouth for a few moments at his interrogator, and then turning round to his next neighbour, very gravely repeated the question—his fellow looked up very hard, and then looked down very hard, and then addressed another of his companions with the same question—and thus it went round the whole six of them with exactly the same result. His worship was horribly inclined to break out into a deadly passion.

"Wounds, I ha' got un!" exclaimed he of the freckled face, slapping his knee very sharply with his palm. "His worship, no doubt, wants the blind piper that lives down yonder below the mill."

"I'll warrant, so he do," added another, with a like gravity.

"I tell thee no! I tell thee no!" bawled out the justice, as the haymakers were shouting their information into his ears, as if each was striving to be heard above the other; "I want no such person. I seek one William Shakspeare, a convicted deer-stealer, who married John Hathaway's daughter."

At this the lame one cast an exceeding long face, rubbed his knuckles against his eyes, and turned away very pitifully; and the others did just the same.

"What hath become of him, I say?" cried the knight, more imperatively, not exactly knowing what to make of these demonstrations.

"An' it please your worship," cried freckled face, blubbering as if his heart was a breaking, "no man can help it. I would he had lived longer, perchance he might have been all the older for it."

"Is he dead indeed, now, fellow?" inquired the old knight, looking somewhat confounded at this unexpected news

"An' it please you, I heard he made so fine an end, it was better than a sermon at fast days," observed another, as woeful as his companion.

"Who's that laughing?" exclaimed Sir Thomas, very sharply; "there's some one behind the rick. Bring him here! Body o' me, I'll teach the unmannerly knave better behaviour." The constables hurried behind the rick, but not the slightest sign of any one was there. This put his worship into a rage. He had certainly heard somebody, and felt a monstrous inclination to punish a person guilty of treating him with so little respect. One of the men thought it was an owl, another took it to be a bat, and a third assured his worship it was only the old sow, who, on an occasion, could grunt in a way marvellous like unto laughing. The justice did not appear to be perfectly satisfied with these explanations; but, after questioning the men some short time longer, and getting from them no greater intelligence, he found himself forced to turn away no wiser than he came. Threatening them all with the terriblest punishments, if he discovered they had told him falsely, the old knight retraced his steps, resolving to see his intelligencer again, and examine him strictly on the correctness of his information, of the which he now entertained some doubts.

"Take heed of the dog, an' it please your worship," cried one of the hay-makers, doubtless with most benevolent intentions; but unfortunately, he gave the caution a moment too late, for as the justice was picking his way carefully along, a dog rushed out of a kennel close upon him, and gave him so smart a bite in the leg, that he roared again. The youthful Shakspeare peeped from his hiding place at hearing this noise, and had the satisfaction of seeing the old knight hopping along the yard at the top of his speed, furiously pursued by a flock of noisy geese and turkeys, who seemed quite as much inclined for a bite of his legs as the dog had been. His little army did not make their retreat in a much more orderly manner, for the house-dog flew at them as they passed his kennel, and the turkeys and geese pursued them when they crossed the yard. His worship was more hurt by the shouts of laughter which followed his undignified exit, than he had been by the bite he had received, but oh, more unpalatable than all!—as he was returning home in a most horrible humour, what should he hear, but a parcel of little children singing the offensive ballad writ upon him, as loud as they could bawl it. His wrath was too great for utterance. He felt he could have hanged every little rogue of them all; but resolved to go to town, and complain to the privy council how infamously he had been used.

After well abusing the constables, and every one else that came within his reach, he sought the unhappy Mabel, and poured out the remainder of his rage upon her; swearing she should marry his friend's servant and no other, and bidding her prepare herself for doing so within a month at least, as he was determined it should then take place. The poor foundling too well knew the character of her companion to attempt to parley with him on the subject. It was manifest her villanous persecutors would not let her rest whilst there remained the slightest chance of their getting her into their power; and having the positive and unsuspicious knight, and his most obedient lady to assist them, they fully persuaded themselves their success was certain. The only bar seemed to lie in the disinclination of her affianced husband to be an agent in the business; but at last, the bribes he was offered appeared to stifle his conscience, and he promised to carry on the matter to its conclusion.

CHAPTER XXV.

Not a word spake he more than was nede,
And that was said in forme and reverence,
And short and quike, and full of high sentence.
Souning in moral vertue was his speche,
And gladly wold he learn, and gladly teche.
CHAUCER.

There is no man
Whose wisdom can
Reforme a wylfull wyffe,
But only God,
Who made the rod,
For our unthryfty liffe.
OLD SONG.

Kath. What our destinies
Have ruled out in their books we must not search,
But kneel to.
War. Then to fear when hope is fruitless,
Were to be desperately miserable;
Which poverty our greatness does not dream of,
And, much more, scorns to stoop to; some few minutes
Remain yet, let's be thrifty in our hopes.
FORD.

TIME passed on, and in due time the young husband was made a father. This occurrence gave his feelings a new impulse. A youth of nineteen, possessed of such deep sympathies, and so ready to indulge them on all natural objects as was the youthful Shakspeare, on such an occasion must needs experience a most choice and exquisite gratification. He felt he had got a stronger claim on his exertions than had he hitherto, and laboured with higher aims than he had before known. Jemmy Catchpole, much as he inclined to do so, knowing of his worth, did not dare employ him; and when he was not assisting his father-in-law in farming, his chief occupation was teaching the sons of the neighbouring farmers and yeomen such matters of schooling as it was customary for them to learn; and this he did so tenderly, and in so scholarlike a manner, that by the parents he soon got to be approved of before all teachers. During this time he failed not to continue his own studies in such fashion as he had been used to; and it was acknowledged, of every person of his acquaintance, that, for learning, they had never met with his peer.

Yet, all this while, he was far from being happy. The ardour of his passion for the yeoman's blooming daughter had blinded him to many faults he could not avoid perceiving in her on closer acquaintance. She had been spoiled by indulgence all her life. Her father had allowed her to do much as she pleased, which had put into her the notion that what she did must always be right, and she would not have it gainsayed of any.

The youthful Shakspeare discovered, too late, his wife's deficiencies in the necessary qualities of mind. Indeed she was perfectly uneducated, and her ignorance made her unconscious of the mischief she was doing by her ungracious conduct. She was not naturally of an unamiable disposition; indeed, at times she was too prodigal in the display of her kinder feelings, but vanity had filled her with most preposterous prejudices; and if her husband opposed her, however slightly, in any matter, however reasonable on his part, she would regard it as using her exceeding ill, and get out of temper speedily, and say uncivil words, and shew all manner of discourteous behaviour. This made her youthful helpmate see into her character more and more, and the more he saw the less he liked, and the less he liked the less he respected. The charm of her beauty gradually vanished away; and as she had nothing in her conversation to attract him, she had no sort of hold over him beyond that of being the mother of his child. Still he treated her as affectionately as ever he had done, considering himself the most to blame for his too great precipitancy, allowing her no just cause of complaint—and striving whatever he could to bring her, by fair persuasions, to a more admirable way of behaving.

Every day he beheld stronger proofs of a vain disposition acting upon a weak mind. Fits of sullenness followed close upon the heels of outbreaks of temper—she neglected the proper duties of a wife and a mother, to enjoy any pastime that was within her reach—and by the lack of ordinary comfort to be had at home, she frequently drove her husband to seek his pleasure where he could. It was a grief that touched him where he could have little or no defence; for when he attempted to remonstrate, in order that he might fail in nothing to induce her to act more commendably, it was sure to end in such a scene of obstinacy, wounded self-love, and unamiable behaving, as plainly shewed him there were marvellous slight hopes she would mend.

Again he became a father. On the first occasion his child was a girl, that he had had christened by the name of Susanna, and now his wife brought him twins, a boy and a girl, that were severally named Hamnet and Judith. For a time this made him regardless of the mother's deficiencies, and increased his kindnesses to her: besides which, he entertained many anxious thoughts of the future. His own means were in no way adequate to his wants, and although John Hathaway took heed of these, so that he should feel them but lightly, he would rather, by many degrees, have satisfied them of his own labour. His old companions, Greene, Burbage, Condell, and Hemings, had one by one gone to join the players; and such reports of their well-doing had reached him, as made him marvellous desirous of following their example.

Unfortunately, his wife merely regarded this late increase in her family as a vast accession to her claims to have her will in every thing that was most preposterous; and more than ever was inclined to behave herself as she pleased, and resent, in every possible way, any attempt to thwart her inclinations. Consequently she daily made greater demands on her husband's patience, which sometimes forced from him well-meant arguments, the which she took very bitterly: and he, finding her to grow so much the worse, so much the more he strove by kindness to make her better, at last made her to know he would leave her, did she not seek to lead him a pleasanter life. But this was far from making her alter her ungraciousness towards him, for she appeared to take it as if she would as soon he went as staid. Still the young husband was reluctant to give her up. He would have been glad to have had any friend's advice, for he saw nought before him but an increasing wretchedness, remained he where he was; and to quit her and the children, although he was well aware her father would properly provide for them, he could not reconcile his conscience to; but he had no friend at this time fit to advise with him in such a strait. His friends at Sir Marmaduke's he had not seen some time, for as he grew to manhood he felt he could not associate with persons so far above him as he had done whilst a boy, and went there less and less, till he refrained from such visits altogether; and he liked not going to John a Combe, remembering how urgently he had warned him against pursuing the very course of which he was now feeling the evil consequences.

After many long and comfortless reflections, he resolved on making a last effort. One fine May morning, a few months after the christening of the twins, he presented himself before her. They were alone. She was tiring of herself in all her choicest braveries, to attend some festival in the neighbourhood. A sort of sprightly indifference was in her manner as she saw her husband approach; as he noticed this, and heard one of the children crying unheeded, in the next chamber, he had no great hope of success in his present undertaking—nevertheless he felt it to be his duty to proceed in it. He walked up and down the chamber with an aching heart, she humming of a tune the while, and decking herself in her finery as if in a perfect carelessness of every thing save her own pleasure.

"Anne, I pray you look to the child, it crieth most pitifully!" exclaimed he at last.

"Joan is there," replied she, carelessly.

"It seemeth that it requireth its mother, and will not be satisfied with Joan," observed her husband.

"Then it *must* be satisfied with her, for I cannot be ever with the children," answered his wife, with some pettishness.

"Methinks, the gratifying the natural desires of a young babe, should be held before all other things with its mother," said William Shakspeare. "She hath a sacred obligation imposed on her which she ought in no way to neglect for the furthering of her own immediate convenience."

"Tut! what should men know of such matters!" cried his companion. "Truly, a fine life of it a poor woman would lead who followed such old saws. I will do no such folly, depend on't. I marvel you should interfere in things so out of your province; but 'tis done merely to prevent my taking my proper pleasure—nevertheless it seemeth to me good I enjoy it."

"I cannot have the slightest wish to debar you of your proper pleasures," replied her husband; "in very truth I would strive my utmost you should enjoy as much happiness as woman can."

"You don't!" exclaimed the other, sharply; "you are in a constant mood of finding fault with me—you will never do as I wish: and when I am for the pleasuring myself with my neighbours, you fail not to raise all manner of foolish improper objections."

"I cannot call any such proper pleasures, when your neighbours are looked to and your children neglected," observed he.

"Marry, I care not what you call them," she answered; "I will do as I list, take it as you may."

"Anne, I implore you to pause in this most unseemly behaving;" said her companion, very urgently; "it doth cause me infinite unhappiness to see you so forget yourself. The ordinary duties of a fond good wife and mother are thrust aside and lost sight of, through utter carelessness. None could furnish my house so pleasantly as yourself, if it chose you to do so; but you seek to make it as wretched as you can by all manner of unbecomingness, unkindness, and neglect. I pray you change such a course for one more desirable to me and more creditable to yourself; and you shall find I do not lack gratitude."

"Gratitude!" echoed the spoiled woman, with considerable bitterness. "O' my word, I have had enough of your gratitude. I have left divers rich suitors to take up with you, who had not so much as would buy me a day's meal. I have brought you every comfort you have in the way of lodging, clothing, and victual; and moreover, three as fine children as an honest father could desire; and yet I am treated as though I had done nothing of all this. 'Tis a fine thing, truly, to treat one so ill who hath been so bountiful to you; but I will put up with no such treatment, I promise you. I will act as it seemeth best to my humour; and in no case will I be driven from my innocent pastime at the will of an ungrateful worthless husband."

"I have already told you I strive not to check you in anything innocent at a proper time," replied her husband; "but I cannot see you ruin your own happiness and mine by a wilful obstinacy in doing wrong."

"You're a base inhuman wretch!" exclaimed the yeoman's daughter.

"I have sought all occasions and all arguments to persuade you to act more becomingly," continued he, "and only brought on myself bitter taunts and ungenerous reflections."

"I wish I had never seen your face, you ungrateful vile caitiff!" added his companion.

"There now remaineth but one thing for me to do," said William Shakspeare, betraying by his voice the struggle in his nature, "as 'tis impossible we can live happily together, we must part!"

"Oh, you may go!" replied she, with a careless toss of her head; "and I care not how soon—and I shall not fret for your coming back, I promise you."

"I beseech you, as my last request, shew such love to the dear children as their tender years entitle them to," said the youthful father, so moved he could scarce speak.

"I pray you dispatch yourself, since you are for going," answered the thoughtless wife more bitterly than before; "and forget not to take with you all that you brought!" Her husband cast one look of reproach on the once object of his so great love—turned away almost choking with his overpowering sensations, and in the next moment he had left the cottage,—the scene of a thousand exquisite pleasures—never to enter it again. He first bent his steps towards Henley Street, to take leave of his parents, and then left the town without speech of any other, for with his present feelings he cared not to be idly talked to and questioned. When he had gone some little distance he stopped to take a last look of his native place. There lay the steeple of the old church, towering above the surrounding houses and trees—the fair land-mark he had hailed returning from so many pleasant rambles; there lay his father's dwelling, hallowed in his recollection by a whole history of early studies, struggles, and pleasures; there lay the winding Avon, in whose sweet waters he had so often laved his limbs, or gathered from its banks continual store of blooming treasure; and there lay a hundred other spots equally well deserving of his remembrance, as the scene of some childish sport or youthful adventure.

He gazed in another direction, and if the yeoman's pretty cottage was not made out in the landscape, he had it in his eyes as clearly as when he first beheld it, attracted thereto by the cheerful singing of the blooming girl at her spinning-wheel. Then followed scene after scene of exquisite enjoyment. The evening meetings, where she waited for him at the next stile—their delicious salutations there—their gentle stroll together back to the old walnut tree, and all the goodly entertainment he had under its friendly shadows, till, after some dozen reluctant farewells, he forced himself away. And last of all came sullen looks and provoking words, and a crowd of attendant miseries, created by the unfeeling thoughtless carelessness of that weak vain woman. And now he saw himself a wanderer—to go wheresoever he would, driven from his home by the very means that had brought such home to him, and deprived of happiness by having had the possession of what he had so long believed could alone secure it him for ever. These remembrances took such painful hold of his heart, that the anguish he endured at that moment was beyond everything he had hitherto suffered.

"Thou shalt see better days anon, dear heart!" exclaimed a familiar voice, and turning round, he beheld nurse Cicely. "Pleasure cometh after suffering as naturally as the green buds after the early rains. All things have their season. Thy time is now for sorrow; but bear up nobly, and be assured greatness shall come of it beyond thy brightest hopes. A fair journey to thee, my sweeting!"—So saying, the old woman hobbled away, leaving the youthful Shakspeare in an especial marvel at her strange words. She had often addressed him in a like manner previously, but he had paid little attention to what she said,—now, however, he pondered on it as he went along, and not without some particular satisfaction. He had not proceeded a quarter of a mile when he met John a Combe. He would have avoided him if he could, for he liked not his company at that moment; but the usurer came suddenly upon him from a lane which led into the road, along which William Shakspeare was passing.

"So!" cried John a Combe, in his usual bitter manner, "thou wouldst not be led by my advice, and art now smarting for't. Serves thee right. But every fool doth the same. Tell them where lies the mischief, they run into it on the instant,—suffer first and repent after. Prythee, what dost intend doing?"

"I am for making the best of my way to London, where I expect meeting with certain friends of mine," replied his young companion.

"Ay, boy, thou'lt meet fools enough there, I'll warrant," answered the usurer sharply. "But 'tis a long journey, and requireth some expense on the way. How art off for means?"

"In truth, not over well—but I must e'en do as I best may," said the other.

"Give me thy purse!" exclaimed John a Combe, and without more ado, he snatched it from his girdle, and then turned his back to him to see what was in it. "As I live, no more than a groat and a shilling!" continued he, in seeming monstrous astonishment. "Why, ere thou hast got a good dozen mile thou wilt be forced to eat thyself for lack of victual. Here, let me put thy purse in thy girdle again." And then the usurer carefully replaced it. "Thou and thy wits have parted company, that's a sure thing."

"I would ask one favour of you, good Master Combe, before I leave you."

"Nay, I will lend thee no money!" quickly replied his companion. "It be not a likely thing a usurer should trust one who starteth on a long journey, with only a knobbed stick by way of weapon, with a bundle of linen at the end on't, carried over his shoulder by way of luggage, and a shove-groat shilling, and a cracked groat in his purse, for store of money for spending."

"I do not require of you such a thing," replied William Shakspeare. "All I would of you is, that if my dear parents need what you have to spare, you will do your good offices to them, and as soon as fortune favoureth me somewhat, I will return whatever you are so generous as to furnish."

"Truly, a fine story!" remarked John a Combe. "Thou art sure to come to great wealth with so prodigal a beginning! It would be monstrous like an usurer, methinks, to lend on such poor security."

"An' you will not, I cannot help it," said the other, dejectedly.

"Nay, I said not I refused!" exclaimed the usurer. "So there is no great occasion thou shouldst look so woe-be-gone. Indeed, I care not to acquaint thee, for thy comfort, seeing thou art not like to come back and tell my neighbours of my infinite foolishness, I have been thy honest father's friend this many a year, and he not know it." His young companion seized his hand gratefully, and looked more thanks than he could have spoke had he twenty tongues. He knew that some secret person had for a considerable period of years been sending sums of money when his parents were in their greatest need, and now it came out it was Master Combe and no other.

"I cannot get out of my old folly, try how I will," continued he, more moved by the other's simple manifestation of his feelings than he chose to shew. "Of the baseness of the world, methinks I have had proof enough. O' my life! there cannot be found more convincing evidence than an honest, worthy man suffering poverty in mean clothing and poor victual, whilst baseness, in a fine doublet, taketh sauce with his capon, and hath money to spare."

"Doubtless the world containeth some unworthy persons," observed William Shakspeare. "It is scarce reasonable to expect it can be otherwise, when such countless multitudes are to be met with in each part of the globe. We shall find weeds in every field; but surely the field deserveth to be called a good field for all that. But why should we dwell on such things? There are flowers, peeping out from our very footsteps, go where we will, and yet we will not see them, but care only to spy what is unsightly or unprofitable. In honest truth, worthy sir, methinks we do Nature a huge wrong by such behaviour of ours. 'Tis manifest injustice to be so blind to merit, and to see only that which is not like to call for our admiration."

"Nay, boy, 'tis the world that is blind to merit, not I," answered the usurer. "I behold thy honest parents struggling all they can to live with a fair credit, though terribly pinced i' the ribs, and the world shutteth its Argus eyes and passeth by. I behold their worthy son shewing signs of an honourable disposition, and talents deserving of as high estimation, yet the world doth appreciate him at so low a price, it will allow of his starting a long journey to London on a chance errand to fortune, with no greater provision than a shilling and a groat All this while the world giveth to villains place and ceremony, and maketh a shallow-witted coxcomb with broad acres pass for a knight o' the shire, and justice o' the peace."

"But how know we this state of things will always continue?" said his young companion. "It may be, for such changes have happened before, that when Master Justice is feeding of the worms, my dear parents shall be enjoying of as much comfort as their hearts can desire; and I, whom he hath so often strove to play his poor spite upon, may leave to my children a better name out of such poor talents as I have, than could he, out of all his broad acres and fine house, serving-men and constables, his worship and knightship, and every other sign of greatness whereof he is used to make such famous boasting, into the bargain."

"See I this, I will believe it," said John a Combe; "yet, with the knowledge I have of the world's baseness, I expect no such welcome changes. Justice is painted blind, and blind she is beyond question."

"I have other thoughts of that," replied William Shakspeare. "I believe that it very rarely happens, when merit sheweth itself in any conspicuousness, it is not kindly taken by the hand to be exalted above all meaner natures."

"Ay, boy, on the pillory or the gibbet," drily added the usurer; "but thou art past arguing. Just as I was at thy age art thou. I would allow none to convince me of any such thing as injustice in nature. Marry, I had such convincing at last, as left me without a doubt to stand upon. I would have thee grow wiser than thou art, but in mercy I would not wish thee any such resistless arguments as crushed my favourable opinions out of me. Get thee gone, Will Shakspeare, and speed on thy errand as well as thou canst. If so be thou art not doing well, write to me without fail; but, at any rate, let me know how thou art proceeding."

"One thing more, worthy Master Combe," said his young companion urgently; "Since you have been so good as to talk of writing, I would you would do me such kind service as to see my children as oft as may be convenient to you, and let me know how get they on in all things."

"And their mother?" added the usurer, with somewhat of sarcasm.

"If you know anything concerning of her worthy to be told, acquaint me with it by all means; but if of another nature, I care not to hear of it."

"Ha!" exclaimed the usurer, sharply; "let it be even so. And now fare thee well, Will Shakspeare. I wish thee every manner of good, though I am in huge doubt anything of the sort is to be found."

"Truly, I cannot help seeing it in yourself, worthy Master Combe, despite of your ungracious seeming," replied his young friend, parting with him in sincere regret. After going a few paces, he turned round to take another glance at his old acquaintance, and, to his surprise, beheld him standing still, looking after him with an aspect of deeper feeling than ever he had observed in him before; but immediately he was noticed, he took on himself the same severe expression of countenance he was wont to wear, and then turning quickly away, paced onwards towards the town.

As William Shakspeare was thinking over the strangeness of his companion, his eyes suddenly lighted on his purse, which, seeming to be much increased in size since he last had sight of it, he took it into his hand, and looking to its contents, to his prodigious marvelling, discovered as goodly a store of coin as he could need the whole length of his journey. Here was a fresh instance of the unhappy usurer's secret manner of doing kindness where it was most needed, and the discovery of it had such effect on the sensitive nature of him he had so providently thought of, that it refreshed him with many sweet feelings, and sent him on his long journey with a more cheerful spirit than he had known a long time. He appeared now to have at his will the means of procuring what he most wished. For, with such a sanguine disposition as he possessed, he believed that were he once in London, he should speedily get such employment as he desired, and then he had in him that conviction he would raise himself greatly, often attending upon the youthful and imaginative.

Filled with these considerations, and with manifold fine plans and excellent fair prospects, he trudged manfully along.

The day was as well-favoured a day to look on as ever appeared in that merry month; the hedges being all over covered with delicate May, and the banks as prodigally gifted with the dainty gifts of the season, which made the air so exquisite, nothing could exceed it in delectable sweetness; added to which, such crowds of small birds were tuning of their little pipes upon every tree and bush, as made most ravishing music all along the road. I doubt much the delightsome aspect of Nature was as pleasantly regarded as it deserved to be by the youthful wanderer; for although he had but a few minutes since determined in his mind he would think no more of his unhappiness, the sight of the odorous flowery hedges brought to his memory that gay morning he went a-maying with his then so deeply loved Anne Hathaway, and the unutterable gladness he enjoyed because of her sharing with him the excellent brave pastimes of that memorable day.

Whilst he was so deeply engaged with such thinking, he did not notice he had a companion, evidently striving to keep up with him, whom he had just passed. This person appeared to be, by his dress, a young boy of some gentle family; for he was clad very neatly in a suit of fine broad cloth, of a gay orange-tawney colour, with good kersey hose, shoes with roses, a well appointed hat and feather on his head, and a light stick or staff in his hand. In person he was of an exceeding elegant shape, indeed such delicate symmetry of limbs is rarely to be met with; and in features he was of a fair handsomeness, yet of a complexion so wan and sickly, it looked as though he was fitter to be in his bed than to be a traveller, for ever so short a distance. He looked fatigued, and it was manifest he could ill keep up with the manly strides of the youthful Shakspeare.

"I pray you, sweet sir, walk not so fast, for I should be wondrous glad of your honest company."

The other turned round somewhat surprised, not knowing any one was so nigh him, and was moved with extreme pity at the slight glance he took of the pallid suffering countenance of the young stranger. He lessened his pace on the instant.

"Go you far on this road, my young master?" inquired he courteously.

"Truly, I know not," replied his companion, in a manner somewhat hesitating; "but the farther I get from the place I have left, the more pleased I shall be."

"Yet you seem in no way fit to go on a journey," observed William

Shakspeare, in some marvel at what he had just heard. "I doubt you are strong enough for much walking."

"I have been in a great sickness a long time, sweet sir," replied the other; "but as I recovered, I found such villany approaching me, that I thought it better to trust to the chance of perishing on a strange road than remaining where I was." At hearing this his companion marvelled the more.

"Keep a good heart, I pray you!" exclaimed the youthful Shakspeare, ready at a moment to sympathize with any unhappy person. "If it please you to let me bear you company, I will take such heed of you, you shall come to no hurt. But to what place are you bound?"

"To any, where I can live in proper honesty," replied the young stranger. "I will willingly essay my strength in such humble manner of living as I can get, with no higher end than the keeping me a worthy name."

William Shakspeare said nothing, but he thought in his mind his fellow-traveller had but a poor chance of a living, relied he only on his strength, and resolved at least, that, as he wanted a friend, a friend he should have. With the true delicacy of a noble mind, he refrained from asking him any questions which might seem to come of over curiousness, but began to talk cheerfully to him, telling him to hope for better times, and entertaining him with such pleasant discourse as he had at his commandment. And so these two proceeded together. The one in the full strength of early manhood, and, though bereft of his happiness, full of health and hope—the other, apparently in the fresh dawning of youth, and in as little comfort of body as of mind.

Methinks this chapter in no case ought to be brought to a conclusion, without requiring of the courteous reader especial notice of a matter therein treated; which, it is to be hoped, will be to his singular profit. In the development of this my story, there hath been made manifest how that kind of love, which is merely ideal, endeth in a complete nothingness, as far as its object is concerned, it being only a fair herald of a more natural passion; but in these later pages it is shewn, that the affection which cometh but of the delight taken by the senses in personal comeliness, must meet with a still more unsatisfactory conclusion. It is true that Nature hath planted in the human heart a capacity for enjoying the beautiful, and a desire to obtain its possession; and the affections of the individual, like unto clear waters, do most perfectly bear in them the resemblance of whatsoever shape appeareth to them in most perfectness; but it should ever be borne in mind, that there are beauties of far sweeter and lasting value, than such as are wont to lie on the surface of things, and that these constitute the sole proper source of their admirableness. The flowers, the stars, and every form of matter, animate or inanimate, impressed with that configuration most pleasing to the sight, possess qualities which make them the love of the poet and the true philosophic sort of persons, exceedingly more so than their mere appearance. They exhibit signs of intelligence, by which they are known to be parts of the universal good; and for the worth they shew are worthily appreciated.

Such should it be with things that more intimately appertain to humanity. The agreeable face and graceful person are the unprofitablest of objects, unless they carry with them the fairer signs of mind and feeling. They may be regarded as such fruit as come of plants imperfectly cultivated, that look tempting to the eye, but are intolerable to the taste; and save the pretty sort of way in which they do garnish their boughs, are of no goodness whatsoever. In this same goodness—which is nought else but another name for intelligence—doth the real source and conclusion of all honest love. This is it that sows the seed—this is it that obtains infinite crops of exquisite sweet fruit. Where there is no moral excellence, there can never be any moral advantage. The youthful Shakspeare, therefore, in shewing, as he did, a total indifference to aught else save the personal charms of the blooming daughter of John Hathaway, brought on himself the positive evil which proceedeth from insufficiency of good. But thus are the marvellous lessons of Nature taught, and how oft are they placed before us in this very fashion! The youth of both sexes, full of the delicious sympathies so newly grown within their breasts, regard in the other, symmetry of limb and loveliness of feature, as vouchers for whatsoever is properest and most desirable, and, at times, do get their several senses so intoxicated by allowing of their imaginations to be excited by the strong draughts proceeding from rosy smiling lips and lustrous enticing eyes, that they clean forget there is aught else in the world worthy of their having. The capacity for enjoyment satiated, quick on the heels of it followeth the ordinary ending of such foolishness. The individual finds the punishment received infinitely exceeds the pleasure obtained, and, instructed by a knowledge of the error he hath committed, seeks, if it be possible in him, to husband his affections with more wisdom.

At the age of eighteen years, it is inconsistent with experience to expect the human heart to be philosophical. Before that age, William Shakspeare found his whole nature thrilled with a passion for a female eight years his senior, and consequently, in the possession of every charm of mature womanhood. He revelled in the delusive gratification of an attachment placed on no surer foundation than personal beauty, and fixing his happiness there, in due time found it levelled to the dust. The result hath rendered him a homeless adventurer, banished from his domestic hearth to seek amongst strangers that comfort he had lost every hope of where he believed it to be most secure. Now must he work out the penalty of his offence, and, by example, teach a great moral lesson unto all humanity, which, perchance, shall not be altogether lost sight of at this time, or at any other.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Example I fynde of Alexaundr Nexam as he wryteth, how there was sumtyme a knyght came from ferr contries wolde seke aventures. So it fortuned to a forrest wher he herd a grete noyce of a beste crying.

Harleian MSS. No. 2247.

Be not deceived, my brother;
This banquet is an harbinger of death
To you and me; resolve yourself it is,
And be prepared to welcome it.

Ford.

The misery of us that are born great.
We are forced to woo, because none dare woo us;
And as a tyrant doubles with his words,
And fearfully equivocates, so we
Are forced to express our violent passions
In riddles and in dreams, and leave the path
Of simple virtue, which was never made
To seem the thing it is not.

Webster.

"I fear me I cannot proceed further," said the younger of the two travellers, leaning against a tree, with head drooping, and every sign in him of thorough exhaustion and faintness.

"I beseech you, good Bertram, lean on me!" exclaimed William Shakspeare, urgently. "Let us get out of this wood as speedily as we may, for the sun hath set some time, and we are like to get benighted in this strange place, stay we where we are much longer."

"I doubt my strength will hold sufficient, yet I will strive my utmost," replied his young companion, in a very feeble voice. Thereupon he leaned his hand upon the other's shoulder, whilst the latter held him round the waist with his left arm, and thus they proceeded, at a slow pace, following a path which led through a thick wood on each side of them. The trees, principally hazel, were in their freshest leaves, save some that were only a budding, and those of the wild plum and cherry were clothed in all their delicate bloom. The roots of the larger trees were wrapt in a soft covering of dainty green moss, through which the lance-shaped leaves of the lily of the valley made their appearance in countless numbers—seemingly as far as the eye could see—mingled with a very prodigal display, not only of all manner of seasonable flowers of divers colours, but with numberless plants and herbs, some savoury and others noxious, that thrust themselves out of every corner. Nothing was visible around but trees and underwood such as hath been described, save here and there, when they came to an open place where the wood had been thinned; and then they beheld some once goodly tree recently felled, stripped of its branches, barked, and lying on the ground as a shapeless, naked trunk; and in other places were small logs for burning, piled up in heaps, with great store of hurdles, bavins, faggots, and other things belonging to the woodman's craft.

It was evident the men had left work—the whole place was so still—not a sound heard the young travellers when they ceased talking, but the monotonous note of the cuckoo. The path was not in any way a pleasant one, for it was in a hard, rough soil, with deep ruts on each side, formed by the passage of heavy carts when the ground was in a softer state, and led now up and now down—crossed occasionally by other paths of a like appearance, with some narrower and less worn, which appeared to be only for foot passengers, with room for but one at a time. Yet along this unpleasant way the two pursued their journey in the manner already mentioned: the more youthful one manifestly sinking at every step, despite of the other's tender charge of him, and encouraging speech to help him along.

Truly, it was a sight well worthy to be looked on, these gentle persons travelling in so friendly a way, the handsome manly face of William Shakspeare beaming with a sweet benevolence, as, with all the tender sympathy of his nature, he gazed upon the upturned pallid countenance of his more youthful associate; but although the latter strove, as forcibly as he could, to get along, it was easy to see, by the languid style in which he drew one leg after the other, and the quick paling of his lips, that he could continue even this sort of progress but a very little longer.

"Cheer thee, sweet sir!" exclaimed the elder of the two, in the kindest accents, "thou wilt be better anon. Put thy foot forward gallantly, we shall be out of this wood straight, and get us to a village where we can have fair lodging for the night."

"Alack! I feel sinking rapidly," replied the other, evidently in extreme faintness. "Bear me up strongly, I pray you—the ground seemeth to be falling."

"Prythee heed it not at all—'tis mere fantasy," said William Shakspeare, holding him as affectionately as a brother. "Courage, my young master, our journey will be at an end speedily—so we shall have brave resting, continue we to proceed. Woe is me, he hath swooned!" The speaker stopped in great anxiety and pitifulness, for he had noted the arm of his companion drop listlessly off his shoulder, and the head fall so droopingly, the youth must have gone to the ground had it not been for the care of his tender guardian. The first thought of the latter was to carry his now helpless fellow-traveller—as no time was to be lost in getting out of the wood before nightfall—and the next minute the young poet was proceeding, gallantly bearing the other in his arms, with all proper gentleness, till at last he was obliged to put him down to rest himself.

His anxiety of mind may be imagined when he beheld, by the dim twilight, the countenance of his young companion set, as it were, in the pale complexion of death, with his limbs motionless, and his eyes closed. So sad a sight smote him to the very heart. What to do he knew not. The shadows of the night were gathering fast around him, and no habitation near, or sign of help at hand. To stay in the wood all night without succour were to make certain for his associate what already looked to be more than possible—his decease; and yet to get out of it he knew no means, for although he had gone a great way, still in whichever direction he looked, nought met his eye but impenetrable dark masses of trees and shrubs. As he made the seeming lifeless Bertram recline against his breast—supporting him with one arm to beguile the other of its weariness—whilst gazing on his pallid aspect, he was so moved by pity he scarce knew what to be adoing. All at once, as he was making the saddest reflections at the poor prospect he had of saving him, he heard the faint barking of a dog, to which he gave, on the instant, so huge a welcome as he had rarely given even to what had seemed to him the pleasantest of human voices. It afforded a most sweet assurance of present help, for, as it appeared to him, it was a sign of some dwelling nigh at hand, or of some person or persons in the wood, of whom he might have the assistance he required.

Presently he shouted as loudly as he could to attract the attention of such people as were within hail, thinking it could not fail of drawing them to the spot where he was. He listened with extreme anxiousness, and a moment after again heard the barking. The sound seemed to come from some place considerably in advance of him, so taking up his burthen more tenderly than ever, he proceeded along the path, till he came to where another path crossed it, and here he shouted again, and listened with a like intense anxiety. It was true he heard the cry of the dog repeated, but he heard no answering shout—which was what he most desired; and this gave him some uneasiness. He turned the way, where he thought the animal and those he belonged to might be found, until somewhat weary of what he carried, he placed him on his feet as before; and then made the wood resound, he set up so main a cry. To his exceeding disappointment nought replied to him but the hound, and in not much louder tones than at first. At this, the idea struck him, that he might bring help to his fellow traveller a famous deal more quickly than could he bring him where it might be found, so placing of Bertram upon a mossy bank about a foot or so above the path, with his back reclining against the broad trunk of a tree, behind which he flung his bundle and stick, he first of all made the piercingest hallo he could, and when he heard the same reply as hitherto, he started off at the top of his speed toward the place whence the cry of the dog came. By stopping at intervals and repeating his shouting and marking the direction of the beast's bark, he soon found to his marvellous content it gradually became louder to his ear, till it was so distinct the animal could not be many yards from him,—and yet he had heard no human voice, nor seen the slightest sign of habitation.

He had turned down all sorts of paths narrow and broad—sometimes forced to thrust his way through the crossing branches, the trees grew so close, and at others to pick his way with more care than speed, the path was so crooked and uneven; at last he came out of this thick wood into an open space and thought he perceived before him something resembling a thick volume of smoke. He approached it closely, and discovered that it proceeded from a monstrous black mass, which he speedily recognized as one of those heaps of dry underwood that are usually kept burning slowly a day or two, that they may be turned into charcoal. The yelping of the dog was now incessant and so close, there was no occasion for more shouting. Directly William Shakspeare passed the pile of charcoal he beheld both the animal and his master standing in the doorway of a mud cabin, in which a blazing fire of logs threw so great a light, the dingy forms of the charcoal-burner and his little four-footed companion as black as himself might be seen distinctly. The former appeared to be an old man of a very crabbed visage, short of stature, thick-limbed, and hump-backed. How he was attired it was not easy to say, for his garments seemed of a colour with his skin—as though he had been charred all over—but there he stood idly at the door of his habitation, and doubtless there he had been standing the whilst he had heard the shouting of the young traveller; and yet he had never attempted to give him any answer, or move from the spot to shew that help was at hand.

"Why dost make such a bawling, and be hanged to thee?" exclaimed the hunch-back surlily, as soon as he caught sight of the youth, the cur the whilst yelping with all his might.

"I pray you, come with me on the instant!" said William Shakspeare, with extreme earnestness. "I have a friend hard by like to be dying for the lack of assistance."

"'Sdeath! thou dost not take me to be so huge a fool surely," replied the charcoal-burner, moving never a whit from his place. "Body o' me, 'twould be a fine thing was I to take to running about the wood, at this late hour, at any body's asking. Get thee gone straight, or may be the dog will give thee a sharp bite o' the legs, or I a smart crack o' the crown." At another time such a threat would have cost him dear; but the other was too wise not to know that violence would go no way towards the assisting of his fellow-traveller.

"I beseech you come to my poor friend's help, and I will pay you handsomely!" exclaimed he, with more urgency, "and here is some earnest your kind labour shall not go unrewarded." So saying, he took from his purse a couple of silver groats, which he placed in the old fellow's hand. The sight of the purse and the touch of the money, as had been anticipated, had an instantaneous effect.

"Prythee tell me, good sir, where your friend may be found, and I will give him what help I can without fail," answered the hunch-back, putting his foot forward very readily; and then cried out angrily to his yelping cur, to whom he gave a slight kick "a murrain on thee—stay thy rude noise; how darest thou bark at so worthy a person!" Whereof the consequence was, that in a very few minutes the whole three were trudging amicably together in search of the helpless Bertram. Young Shakspeare soon became somewhat bewildered as to the path he should follow, he having in his speed taken no great note of the right one; so he went up one and down another, without exactly knowing he was going his proper way or not. Nevertheless, after proceeding a considerable distance with no profit, he began to have a suspicion he had come in a wrong direction and hinted as much to the charcoal-burner, which brought them to a full stop, and a consultation as to what was best to be done.

"Didst heed nothing anigh the place you left your friend?" inquired the hunch-back. "Nothing notable in the tree, or in the place close upon it, by which you might distinguish it again?"

"As I remember there was something," replied the other; "I perceived a number of different small animals—I know not of what sort, for I could not distinguish them—hanging from the tree's branches."

"Body o' me!" exclaimed the charcoal-burner, in a sort of famous surprise, "that be the Tyburn oak, as we call it in these parts, for 'tis used by the keepers, as a gibbet, upon which they do execution upon all manner of weasels, pole-cats, foxes, owls, shrikes, and other wild destructive things that are caught in traps, set in different parts of these woods; and it lies down in Dead Man's Hollow, at least a full mile from this. Had you turned to the left instead of to the right, when starting from my cot, we had reached it long since."

For this mistake there was no remedy but to retrace their steps, which they did with as much speed as they could,—William Shakspeare somewhat uneasy at having left his young companion for so long a time, and his guide in an eager humour to be a touching some more of the other's money. In due time they arrived at the tree, the same tree out of all contradiction from which the latter had started in pursuit of assistance for his friend; for there lay behind it the bundle and the stick he had thrown there, but of Bertram there was no sign. This put him in a fearful perplexity. He thought, perchance, on returning to consciousness, and finding himself, as he might think, abandoned, the youth had strayed away in hopes of discovering a path that led out of the wood; and this idea put him in huge discomfort; for, as it appeared to him, the young stranger was almost sure to be lost in the numberless different paths that led here and there in all directions. He presently fell to acquainting the hunch-back with his thoughts.

"I doubt that, master," replied the charcoal-burner; "an' he were in such a strait as you have said, methinks it must needs be he could have been in no case for further journeying. I am more apt to think he hath been moved by other persons."

"How can that be?" inquired the other. "I saw no one in the wood but ourselves."

"That might be, master," said the hunch-back; "but at this late hour, when the place seemeth to be deserted of every one, the Lord Urban, whose property it is, as well as great part of the surrounding country, wandereth alone in it for hours together, and 'tis like enough my lord hath fallen on your friend in his rambles, and seeing how much he wanted immediate succour, as you have said, hath borne him to his own fair mansion, scarce half a mile from this place."

"It may be," observed the young traveller, considering the probability of what had just been advanced; "but who is this Lord Urban, for I should be glad to know if my friend is in safe hands?"

"Be assured he cannot be better off," answered the hunch-back, "and if you will with me, and share the shelter and the cheer of my cot, I will tell you whatever you may require concerning of him, and in the morning direct you the nighest way to his mansion."

Believing that nothing more desirable could be done, William Shakspeare assented cheerfully to the charcoal-burner's proposal, on condition that they should previously search about where they were, to see if the lost youth had lingered in the neighbourhood. Finding nothing of him, they then bent their steps towards the mud cot, and in a few minutes entered it together. The new comer found it the most primitive habitation he had ever been in in all his days, there being no windows to it, the ground constituting the floor, in the centre of which was a large fire burning, which the hunch-back quickly replenished with fresh logs. The smoke had no other way of exit but through the open door, and therefore gave a most dingy coat to the whole interior. On the fire was a sort of kettle swung. A foot or two from it was a table and chair, at the other side a kind of bed, made of branches of green broom, with a log of wood by way of pillow, and in the corner a rude cupboard; beside which there were in other parts of this chamber divers woodman's tools, and spades, gins, and other instruments. Against one part of the wall was a hare hanging, and nearly opposite a leather jerkin.

The charcoal-burner wiped the chair for his visitor, who in honest truth was glad to find such resting, did the same office for the table, and presently placed on it, with trenchers, knives, latten spoons, and other necessaries, a smoking dish of stewed coneys, that smelt so savoury, the young traveller did not require much pressing to induce him to have at them; and his companion, making himself a stool out of a tall log, eat and drank with such extreme heartiness, it could not fail being a provocation of itself; but the edge of the other's appetite was sharp enough without such setting, in consequence of a long and tiresome journey, and he made as good a meal as he had done any day of his life before. The old fellow then gossipped about his lord sundry marvellous stories, till the other gave a hint he would be glad of getting some sleep.

"If you can bring yourself to accept of such poor lying as I have, 'tis at your commandment," replied the charcoal-burner, pointing to the bed of broom-branches at the other side of the fire.

"Truly, I think it as pleasant a couch, for one as weary as am I, as a king's bed," answered the other; "but how mean you to take your sleep? I like not depriving you of your customary comfort."

"Heed me not master. I can sleep on a chair as fast as can I any where," said the old fellow. Whereupon, his young companion presently went, and threw himself upon the charcoal-burner's bed, and the other sat himself in the chair, and in a few minutes it appeared as if both were in as sound sleeping as they could well have. But as regards the hunch-back, his slumber was but feigned. He found he could get no rest for thinking of the young stranger's purse, with a greedy longing to make it his own, and yet he could not resolve himself into attempting to deprive him of it. He was striving in his mind, to find some way by which he might do so in perfect security. If he took it privily as he slept, he might discover the loss on waking, and could not fail of suspecting the robber, and would straightway demand its restitution, or might speed to the Lord Urban's, where he was bound as he said, and acquaint some of them there with his having been so plundered, by which speedy punishment was likely to follow. This suited the charcoal-burner not at all. Still, he was intent upon having the money—for the demon of covetousness had a fast hold on him—but hours passed without his coming to any determination. At last, an idea was started in him, that appeared to give him the purse, and provide against all dreaded consequences; yet, such was the character of this idea, that as soon as it was well conceived of him, he gazed stealthily round the chamber, to note if any were nigh enough to get note of it. Assured that none were within the cabin save the stranger, and that, as his breathing declared, he was in a deep sleep, the hunch-back quietly rose from his seat, and cautiously picking something from a corner, stole with the noiseless step of a cat, out of the place.

The youthful Shakspeare had got himself into a famous dream. He fancied he was in a fierce battle, in company with his once notable kind friends the two young knights, wherein, after much brave fighting on his part, he had been overthrown, and lay so sore wounded, he could not move. He heard the battle raging around him—the clashing of the swords, the blows of the curtle-axes, the cries of the combatants, and the groans of the wounded, and these so nigh, it seemed plain he should be crushed to death in the melee, still he had no power of moving, strove he ever so; and this horrible dread so increased, that upon a sudden rush of the battle towards him so tumultuously it was manifest his doom was sealed, divers fell so heavily upon him, he started at the shock and awoke. He could still hear the clashing of the swords, though his eyes were wide open; but gradually he became conscious, as he looked about him, he had been in a dream, and he remembered where he was lying. The fire in the centre of the hovel was now burning low, so as to throw an indistinct lurid light about the place—the dreamer looked for his host; but there was the table, with the supper things still uncleared away, and there the chair, in which he had last seen the charcoal-burner, reposing himself for his last night's rest, bare of a tenant; nor did he appear to be anywhere in the cabin. At this discovery, the dreamer marvelled somewhat. As he listened more attentively, his quick sense of hearing could plainly distinguish, that what he had taken to be the noise of swords clashing together, was the sharpening of some weapon with a stone. Whereupon, he fell into a greater wonder than before. It seemed strange the hunch-back should want to be sharpening of anything at that hour. On a sudden, he called to mind the covetous looks of the old fellow whenever he glanced at his purse, and then he had some suspicions the other meant him no good.

In a moment he reached down the old jerkin that was hanging on the wall, and with it covered the log of wood that had served for a stool, which he laid in the exact place in which he had recently been lying, keeping himself back in the deep shadow, for the purpose of watching to note whether his suspicions were well or ill-grounded. Presently, he beheld the charcoal-burner with a very devilish visage, as it appeared by the light of the fire cast upon it, enter the hovel, and stealthily approach his bed, with a woodman's bill in his hand, the edge of which he was feeling with his thumb, mayhap to note if it was sharp enough for his purpose. In the mind of the youthful Shakspeare, there now could not be a doubt of the old fellow's murderous intentions. Indeed, the eager, cautious, fiend-like look he had as he crept along with his weapon, was sufficient evidence of the deadliness of his object. The supposed sleeper lay still as death close against the wall, and that portion of the chamber being farthest from the fire, it was so dark no object could be seen, and about the bed of broom, there was only so much light as to see forms without clearly distinguishing them.

The hunch-back approached the bed closely. He stopped as he got nigh to the top of it. At this, William Shakspeare was in some apprehension the other would spy the cheat, and was preparing himself for a desperate conflict, if such should be the case. However, presently, he beheld his treacherous host lift his weapon above his head, and the next moment it came down with such monstrous force, it cut through the jerkin, and stuck firm in the log beneath. Then the pretended sleeper sprung from his concealment, but not in time to secure the villain, who, the instant he heard the rustling of his intended victim as he rose from his hiding, saw clearly enough he had been foiled in his murderous purpose, and with a muttered execration rushed from the hovel at the top of his speed, pursued by his dog, who had been a curious spectator of the whole scene. The other did not think it advisable to follow them into the intricacies of the wood at such a time, so he first pulled out the bill from the log, the which took all his strength to do, it was buried so deep into the wood, meaning to use it in his own defence should there be occasion; then made the fire burn bravely, resolving to wait where he was till daylight.

Finding himself in no way molested after some time, he went to the door and looked out. The heap of charcoal was still smoking. All around lay the spreading trees, and above, the cold grey sky, such as it appeareth in the early morning. The stillness was most profound; but this lasted only a brief while. Presently, the wind came sweeping among the leaves, sighing heavily as if in a great weariness, and making a notable trembling of all the tender green things it passed over, as if they liked not the approach of such a visitor. It died away, and all was still again. Again, it rushed onward in its broad path with the like consequences, and anon, the whole wood was hushed into a deep sleep: and so it continued. After an hour or so of these changes observed by the young poet with such pleasure as none but minds like his, so perfectly attuned to the sweet harmonies of nature, can be familiar with, on a sudden, he heard a slight chirping; then another in a different direction, and answering to that a third, and ere another minute had passed, there was so goodly a chorus of chirping, whistling, warbling, and all manner of such choice singing, from the whole neighbourhood, as was quite ravishing to hear. Then numberless small birds, of different hues, were seen busily whetting of their beaks against the tiny twigs, or hopping in and out amid the branches, or descending to the ground, feeding on such palatable things as they could find; and in noting of their different songs, their pretty ways, and their soft glossy plumage, the youthful Shakspeare forgot all thoughts of preparing himself against threatened murder. Indeed, he could not entertain any idea of violence amongst such pleasant happiness as now surrounded him.

After enjoying of this fair scene for some time, and impressed with the conviction the charcoal-burner had no mind to return, fearing to be punished for his villany, the young traveller once more took to his bundle and stick, and ventured out of the hovel, in the expectation of meeting some one or another coming to his work, who would be his guide to the Lord Urban's mansion, in case he should not be able to find it by following the direction given by the murderous hunch-back the preceding night. He proceeded on his path, bent upon ascertaining as well as he could how his young friend had fared, and then continuing his journey as speedily as he might. He met nothing, save the proper denizens of the wood, coneys, hares, and sundry different sorts of birds, who speedily took themselves elsewhere at his approach, till he turned the corner of the path; and then he stopped suddenly, for he beheld a scene, the like of which he had never witnessed before. Opposite him, leaning against a tree, stood a tall man, apparently of some fifty years or so, negligently clothed in handsome apparelling. His countenance was the most woe-begone he had ever seen, pale, haggard, and care-worn, with misery written in every line; notwithstanding which there was something so truly noble in the features, that the grief they expressed seemed as though exalted beyond the reach of ordinary sympathy. His arm resting against the tree afforded a support for his head, in which position he had placed himself, with his eyes fixed upon the ground, and ever and anon giving of such groans and deep sighs as were exceeding pitiful to hear. Presently he moved, clasped his hands forcibly together, and lifted up his eyes to the sky with a look so heart-rending, he who alone saw it could never forget it. Sorrow in any, appealeth to the heart of the spectator; but when the majesty of manhood putteth on its sad livery, there is no such moving sight in the whole world.

The stranger then took to walking two or three paces to and fro, in the path, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and his aspect bearing the signs of a consuming grief. Again he stopped—and the expression of his countenance changed greatly—it bore a terrible suspiciousness; and then anger, scorn, and hatred followed each other rapidly.

"Infamous wretch!" exclaimed he, in a voice so hollow and *broken, it did not appear to belong to a living creature;* "her punishment hath been as intolerable as her crime! 'Tis fit—'tis fit such guilt should be so visited. A most just judgment—a most proper vengeance!" At this he walked about as before, and soon returned to the more quiet sadness he had at first exhibited; and then he groaned, and smote his breast with his clenched fist, and shook his head most woefully, and muttered something which could not be heard. The youthful Shakspeare, with a natural delicacy, liking not to be seen taking note of the stranger's actions, was turning away, when he was discovered.

"Ah, fellow, what dost here?" angrily cried the distracted gentleman, rushing upon him with the speed of a young deer; and then, placing himself in his path, appeared to examine him with a severe scrutiny. A glance seemed to suffice, for the expression of his features changed instantly; and he spoke in a gentler voice, "Heed not anything you may have heard," said he, putting his hand on the youth's shoulder. "I am subject to strange fits—and I rave about I know not what. I pray you, think not hardly of me, if you have listened to aught to my disadvantage." And then he took the other tenderly by the hand as if he was an especial friend, and gazed in his face in such a manner as might one who would shew in his looks his affectionate regard of a companion he talked with.

"Be assured I heard nothing I could place to your discredit," replied the young poet, much moved at the other's strange way of addressing him. "And what I did hear, I came on accidentally, and listened to from sympathy rather than curiousness."

"Ah! doubtless!" said the earl, hurriedly. "But how came you in this place so early?—it is not usual to be travelling at such an hour."

William Shakspeare then spoke of his last night's adventures; to which the other listened with singular curiousness, acknowledging himself to be the Lord Urban, and that it was he who had removed the helpless Bertram, finding him in the case he was—asking many questions about him, and last inviting his new acquaintance to see him at the house where he lay. To this the other gladly assenting, these two proceeded there together. The mansion was the largest and fairest to look at William Shakspeare had seen, save only Kenilworth Castle, and it lay in the centre of a noble park. As they approached it they came upon several parties of men—perchance going to their labour of the day—all of whom did the earl a notable reverence, that he acknowledged with a suitable graciousness; soon after which the young traveller followed his noble guide, by a private entrance, into the interior of that stately dwelling.

CHAPTER XXVII.

I was wery of wandering, and went me to rest,
Under a brode banke, by a bourne side,
And as I lay and lened, and loked on the water,
I slombered into a sleeping, it swyzed so mery.

THE VISION OF PIERCE PLOWMAN.

Clown. What hast here? ballads?
Mopsa. Pray now sing some! I love a balla' in print, o' life,
For then we are sure they are true.
Auto. Will you buy any tape,
Or lace for your cape,
My dainty duck my dear-a?

SHAKSPEARE.

Borach. Tush! I may as well say the fool's the fool. But see'st thou not what a deformed thief this fashion is?

Watch. I know that Deformed; he has been a vile thief this seven year; he goes up and down like a gentleman. I remember his name.

IBID.

WHEN William Shakspeare left his fellow traveller, it was with unfeigned regret to part with one for whom, as it seemed, he had conceived so great a liking; but it was also with a singular satisfaction on his part that the youth had fallen into such good hands. Bertram had resolved to stay where he was, partly from having been much pressed to do so by the Lord Urban, who had used him exceeding civilly; and in some measure, because he felt quite unable to attempt any further travel, he was in so helpless weak a state. Having received, from divers of the earl's serving men, the necessary directions for pursuing his way, and having not only refreshed himself famously, but been liberally provided with a prodigal store of choice eating and drinking for his comfort on the road, the young traveller trudged manfully on pursuing of his journey.

It chanced, after he had walked till he was getting to be tired, he came to a brook side which murmured very pleasantly, and sitting himself down on the grass, under an alder tree, he presently fell to making a meal of the victual he had; the which pleased him infinitely, for the meat was of the best, and though he had no sauce save his own hunger, that latter gave so sweet a relish no other was wanting; and then he drew a flask of wine from under his doublet, and took a fair draught of it, which also gave him wonderful content. Now, whether it was he had had but little sleep many nights, or whether it was the strength of the wine got into his head, or the murmuring of the brook made him drowsy, I know not; but after yawning several times most unequivocally, and stretching his arms out, and shewing other signs of oppressive weariness, presently he lay his length on the grass, with the bundle under his head, and the stick in his hand, and in a few minutes was in the enjoyment of as sweet a slumber as he had known a long time.

But mayhap it was the pleasant dream which then visited him that gave his sleep such absolute pleasantness; for, truly, it was as delectable a dream as sleep ever produced—though it was made up of all manner of strange pageants and unheard of famous marvels. Sometimes it took the shape of a goodly theatre filled with a noble company, and he a player whose very presence made the whole place to resound with plaudits—anon he had writ a play to be played before the Queen's Majesty and the great lords and ladies of her court; and he received most bountiful commendation from such glorious audience;—and then he would be writing of poems that should be so liked of all persons of worship, there should scarce be anything in such esteem. And so the dream went on in divers other scenes of a like sort, as if there could be no end to the greatness they promised him; and, in the end, there danced before his eyes the same pretty company of fairy dancers, singers, and revellers, as had used to haunt his slumbers in his younger days; and one more delicately apparelled than the rest, and of surpassing beauty, beckoned him onward as she flitted gracefully before him, singing of some words of exquisite hopeful meaning.

At this he woke suddenly, and the bright visions changed into a fair landscape—the sweet music was turned to the faint humming of the water; and the press of tiny shapes, in their rare bravery, changed to innumerable small insects that were skimming the surface of the brook. The sleeper started from his position, and after refreshing himself by laving of his face in the water as he lay down on the bank, he shouldered his little burthen, and continued his journey in a gayer humour than he had been in since its commencement. He now more than ever took to the laying of plans and drawing out of schemes for his advancement; and the first and most notable of these was to make the best of his way to London, to find out the elder Burbage, who was the chief of a company of players there, and offer himself to be of his company; the which he doubted not would be allowed, Burbage having already knowledge of his fitness for to be a player, having witnessed his first essay when he so readily undertook to fill the post of the sick boy.

On entering a town on market day, and having passed long lines of pens for sheep and pigs, and droves of cattle—rude carts laden with sacks of grain, piles of cheeses heaped up in the open place, along side of baskets of eggs, poultry, and butter, with here a show perchance of a wild Indian—there a famous doctor on a platform, offering to cure all diseases—in another spot the notablest conjuror and astrologer in the whole world, surrounded by gaping crowds of farmers, yeomen, and rustical sort of people—and elsewhere a harper singing of the popular old ballads in a circle of well pleased listeners of both sexes, he was stopped by a throng of persons of all ages and conditions, who seemed to be laughing very merrily at the rivalry of two travelling chapmen, seeking by dint of volubleness of tongue and low humour to get off their wares. The one was an amazing red-nosed old fellow, with one eye, but there was in it so droll a twinkle, and it seemed so active withal, it was evident it grieved not for the loss of its partner. He had got with him a handful of ballads and broad sheets, and a bundle at his back, which he was striving all his craft of tongue to dispose of. The other was a pedlar—a rare rogue, of a most facetious vein, who whilst in serious commendation of his wares failed not to utter a sly jest at his rival. He had his pack opened before him, displaying all manner of ribbons and trinkets, which he shewed as openly as he could, and praised as though nothing half so good could be had anywhere.

"Out with your pennies, my masters!" cried the ballad-monger. "Here is a choice time for spending. Delicate ballads! Rare ballads, new and old! Here is one of an amorous turnspit who got so madly in love with his master's daughter, he forgot his proper duty to that extreme, he basted himself instead of the meat. It was sworn before the mayor he never came to his right senses till the cook run a knife into him to see if he was done. No history so true. Here is another of a merry apprentice, who kissed all the women, beat all the watch, and hanged all the cats within five miles of him, and how he afterwards became the powerfulest merchant in the world. All writ down in an especial edifying manner for the instruction of young persons. Here is the dialogue of the Oxford scholar, and the tanner of Woodstock, concerning of woman, whether she be fish, flesh, or fowl. Full of most delectable fine argument and deep learning. Buy, my masters, buy! Never had I such prodigal pennyworths. Most true ballads—only happened t'other day was a month. I sell no copper brooches for gold. Here are no glass beads to pass for fine stones. I seek not to cozen you with pewter for silver. These are ballads, my masters—none so good have been writ this hundred year—choice for singing—choice for reading, and choice for sticking against the cupboard door."

"Here is Paris thread of the best," said the pedlar. "Here are ribbons for holiday wear, that when given to a comely damsel, force her to be so desperate after the giver, he shall marry her in a week. Here are garters so exquisitely fashioned, they make a neat ankle of so ravishing a shape, not an eye shall gaze on it without being lost in love for the owner. Here are pins and needles warranted to prick none, save those they run into. Here are leather purses that have been charmed by a conjuror, so that they have the virtue to double whatever money they shall hold. Here is famous goldsmith's work in wedding-rings of metal that cannot be matched for sterlingness, and are moreover known to keep all wives true to their husbands, and to hold them so obedient withal, they shall take a cudgelling or kissing with a like good will. Here are locks for hair—brooches and ear-rings, garnished with stones beyond all price—necklaces and chains from beyond seas, and all so marvellous cheap they should be a bargain at thrice what I will sell them for. All true lovers come to me, I will insure you your desires at a small cost. All generous good husbands now is your time to win your wives to honest affectionateness. I am no dealer in monstrous dull lies that would make a dead man stir in his grave to hear of such roguery. Here is no poor foolish stuff put into measure to cheat simple persons into a laugh. I have my eyes about me, and believe others not to be so blind as some that take but a half look at things do fancy. Judge for yourselves. Note how excellent are my wares. Whatever you lack you shall have of such fineness and at so cheap a rate as you can never have again. Girdles, belts, points, laces, gloves, kerchiefs, spoons, knives, spurs, scissors, thimbles, and all other things whatsoever, made so well and fast, they shall last till you die, and after that serve you as long as you may have use for them."

In this strain the two continued, to the huge entertainment of the assembled rustics, who greedily bought of each, and laughed loudly at their sly allusions to the other's efforts to cheat them. The young traveller passed on as soon as he could—somewhat amused at the droll roguery of those merry knaves, till he came to another crowd about the town-crier, who had just made the whole neighbourhood resound with the clamour of his bell, causing persons to throng around him from all parts. William Shakspeare could only get near enough to hear a word or so that was bawled louder than the rest, so he asked of a staid simple-looking man at his elbow, what it meant.

"It meaneth that the Queen of Scots hath escaped," replied he, "and hue and cry hath been made for her from town to town, and from tithing to tithing. And, moreover, that London hath been set on fire, and that the papists are rising in all parts, bidding of every man to get himself in armour, in readiness to do battle in defence of the Queen Elizabeth, and to search for and seize on the false Queen of Scots wherever she may be found."

This intelligence surprised the young traveller exceedingly, and amongst the market people it caused a singular commotion, for presently they all broke up into little knots discoursing of no other matter—some alarmed—some valiant—some threatening, and every one talking or seeking to talk of the escaped queen, the fire, and the papists. William Shakspeare was proceeding on his way as speedily as he could, marvelling at what he had heard, when of a sudden he found himself seized firmly, and turning round beheld the person he had just spoke to, with his face flushed as though in some extraordinary excitement, and his whole frame in such a tremble as if he was taken with a sudden ague.

"I charge you to surrender yourself peaceably," exclaimed he to his astonished prisoner.

"For what cause, I pray you?" inquired the latter.

"I arrest you as a false traitor and horrible malefactor against the queen's highness, our sovereign lady, whose poor constable I am," replied the other, seeming in terrible fear lest he should escape. "Ask of me no questions, but come strait before his worship the mayor—at your deadly peril."

"I assure you I have done no offence—there must be some mistake in this," said his companion.

"An' you seek to breed a bate by any shew of false words, I will call on all true men to bear you along forcibly," added the constable. Believing both resistance and arguments would be useless, the prisoner allowed himself to be led by the person who had detained him, followed by a throng of the curious, of whom many, especially the women, grieved to see so handsome a youth in such custody. In a few minutes he found himself at the end of a long chamber, with a portly looking fellow, manifestly a miller by the flour with which his garments were covered, that could be seen under his mayor's gown—sitting at the top of a table, in close and earnest consultation with a butcher on one side of him, and a vintner on the other, and then dictating to a bull-headed sturdy knave in the common dress of a smith.

"Silence in the court!" cried the miller, the moment the constable opened his mouth to make his accusation, and the mayor spoke so commandingly, the other contented himself with keeping fast hold of his prisoner; and seeming in a wonderful anxiousness and solicitude. It appeared that these worthies were the chief officers of the corporation, and they were about sending of a letter to the queen's council concerning of the important intelligence of which the reader is acquainted, saying what they had done, and asking what further they should do. Every thing was first debated betwixt the miller, the butcher, and the vintner, who appeared to be as thoroughly ignorant of proper forms of speech in which to express themselves, as any three persons could; and yet they spoke as confidently as if they considered themselves amongst the sages of the land.

"Now, Alderman Hobnail, read what hath been writ, and our memories shall hold it the better," said the mayor, whereupon the scribe took the paper in his hand, and slowly, as if he could make out his own writing with some difficulty, he read what follows:—

"An' it please you, right honourables, we have had a certain hue and cry arrive here, charging of us to make diligent searchings in all manner of our lanes and alleys, highways and byways, for the Queen of Scots, who is fled; likewise of her majesty's city of London, by the enemies set on fire; whereby in great haste we have got ready our men and armour, with such artillery as we have, on pain of death, as by the precept we were commanded; and have charged divers of our constables to seek out and apprehend the said Queen of Scots, if so be she is lurking in our township; but as yet we have gained no intelligence she hath ventured herself into these parts——"

"Please your worships, the Queen of Scots is here in my safe custody!" exclaimed the constable, who found it utterly impossible to withhold any longer the intelligence of the important capture he imagined he had made. At hearing this, the mayor and aldermen started from their seats in such amazement as they had never shewn before; but their surprise was far exceeded by that of the prisoner, who at last could not help laughing outright. "Please your worship, the fact be manifest. This person came up to me, whilst the crier was giving out the intelligence of the Queen of Scots' escape, and not hearing what Master Giles said, he having a pestilent hoarseness, asked of me what he was saying; and on the instant I told him—her I should say—he—she I mean—took himself, or rather herself, off, with the design of escape, as hastily as might be. Whereupon I felt assured he—she I should say—was no other than this escaped queen; for, as I remember, the Queen of Scots is said to be fair, so is this person—and in no way deformed, which tallies with this person to a hair—and of a well-favoured countenance, the which this person hath also; and in huge trouble and anxiousness lest he—she should escape, I made him—her I mean, my prisoner, and have herewith brought him—her I should say, into your worships' presence, to be further done with as your worships shall think fittest."

The whole assembly seemed in so monstrous a marvel, they appeared as if they could do nothing but stare at the supposed queen.

"Surely this person looketh but little like a woman," observed the mayor at last; at which the vintner very pithily remarked, there were divers of that sex who looked not what they passed for; and the butcher added, with a like shrewdness, it was well known of many women, that on an occasion they could enact the man so much to the life, their husbands could not do it half so well. Hearing these fine arguments, the miller looked somewhat puzzled, and again the constable put in sundry other reasons of his for coming to the conclusion he had—all which, with his singular confusion of he's and she's which marked his discourse, appeared to afford infinite diversion to the suspected Queen of Scots. Presently, being called upon to give an account of himself, the latter strove to convince the worthies of the corporation of the ridiculous blunder of the constable, by pointing to his moustache, saying, as gravely as he could, he never knew that formed any part of the escaped queen's countenance; and then uncovered his head to shew how different his hair was to a woman's; but this only led to a consultation of the mayor with his chief advisers, and hearing something about empanelling a jury of matrons, the young traveller immediately tore open his doublet, and put beyond a doubt—to the horrible disappointment of the constable—that he was neither her highness of Scotland, nor woman of any kind. After which, he made such choice jests of the affair, that set the whole corporation laughing right heartily, and was dismissed from custody, amid the merry congratulations of every one present, save only Master Constable, against whom his doings of that day furnished his acquaintance with a continual jest.

William Shakspeare got out of the town without further molestation; and, on the road, coming up to a heavily laden waggon, drawn by six horses, he made a bargain with the waggoner to take him to Oxford. On getting into the vehicle, he nearly placed himself in the lap of an old lady there seated, in consequence of his not seeing clearly, the interior was so dark; but he excused himself so gracefully, that he soon got to be on exceeding friendly terms with her. As his eyes became more used to the darkness, he began to make out the figures of his fellow-travellers.—First there was the old lady, a notable motherly sort of dame, going to London to visit her daughter. She was marvellous social, talking of her affairs as if each one present was her intimate dear friend and gossip of long standing, although she had seen none before she joined them in the waggon.

Next to her was a sickly looking boy, going with his mother, who seemed to hold him very tenderly, to get advice of the notablest chirurgions of London for his ailments. These spoke but little, and only in a few whispers one to another. Beside these were two young Oxford scholars, keeping up a continual arguing on all manner of subjects, as if they could not live a minute without shewing of their skill in logic, yet neither could convert the other to his opinion, for each debated the more strongly, the more closely he was combatted. There was but one more of the party, and he was a stout glover from Woodstock, who had been staying with some friends in Wales. He was a great devourer of news, and was no less desirous of playing the intelligencer himself, then he was to listen to the news of another. The young traveller was soon seized on by the old dame going to London, and the stout glover of Woodstook, as a listener for one, and an intelligencer for the other.

"By my troth, I shall be right glad to get to my journey's end," said the former; "as I told my maid Lettice the very morning I started; and she had a monstrous longing to be of my company, so that she might see London streets paved with gold, and to get but a glimpse of the queen's glorious majesty, of whom she had heard such marvels; but my husband, who loveth a jest dearly, said that she was in no condition to have her longing gratified, and must first be married a decent time ere she should speak of such things. Indeed, my husband hath an exceeding merry humour; but he meaneth no harm by it to man, woman, or child, I promise you. I was but a girl when he took me to wife. I remember the day as well as though it were but yesterday; and in honest truth it will be just forty years come Candlemas. Ah! I little thought then I should ever be taking of a long journey to see a daughter of mine own settled in Barbican, whose husband is so highly related he hath a brother, whose wife is first cousin to my lord mayor! Ay, I thought no more of it than could an unborn babe. But none can foresee what great things shall come to pass.,"

"Know you any news, good sir?" inquired the glover, who had been waiting impatiently to put that question for some minutes. The young traveller acquainted him with what he had heard in the town he had lately left, not forgetting to relate the droll blunder of the constable in taking him to be the escaped Queen of Scots, to which his companion listened with prodigious interest, as no news could, in his conceit, be so credible as that which is given by the party who had been an actor in it.

"Ha!" exclaimed the Woodstock man, "there have been continual bruits of the Queen of Scots escaping, ever since she hath been a close prisoner. Perchance it is like enough to happen. I did myself hear of a horrible conspiracy she had entered into to let in the Spaniards and destroy all the protestants in the kingdom. Truly, she is a most pestilent base woman. Yet know I for certain, that my Lord of Shrewsbury's dealings with her have not been honest. Indeed, I could tell of a certain christening of which I have had the minutest particulars—secret though it was. But of such scandals about her there is so famous a plenty, that if but one half be true, it maketh the other half credible."

"My husband, as I remember, told me she was a horrible papist," said the old dame; "and I heard worthy master curate declare, after service, the very Sunday before I left, she must needs be a most wicked wretch, else would she forswear all toleration of such villany: and as fair a preacher is he as you shall find in any pulpit; and taketh his dinner with us some twice at least in the week, and always commendeth my skill in cookery; and, as he hath himself told me, esteemeth my husband as the godliest Christian-man he hath ever known; and myself as the notablest perfect housewife in the whole parish."

"Heard you any fresh matters in Scotland?" asked the glover. "Are the French busy there in any new intrigues, think you?"

"Really, I know not; for I have spoke with none capable of rightly informing me of such things," replied the youthful Shakspeare.

"Is it true, the unhappy news of the murder committed on the poor Prince of Orange?" inquired the other, with huge earnestness. "And is there any intelligence to be relied on concerning of the embassy of Sir Philip Sydney to condole with the French king on the death of his dear brother, the Duke of Anjou?" A number of other questions of news followed these in quick succession, whereby it appeared that this greedy intelligencer was seeking to get note of every thing going forward in every part of the world; but his companion gave him such scanty answers, he was fain at last to give up all hope of turning him to any more profit—and the old dame having told the ages of her children and grandchildren, with the fullest particulars of their several histories, also rested her tongue—so that he was left to attend to the dialogue of the Oxford students, who had hitherto heeded nothing but their own arguing.

"Nay, that cannot be, for Aristotle declareth the very reverse," said one, with prodigious earnestness.

"But what sayeth Socrates on that head?" replied the other, somewhat triumphantly. "Ay, and Epicurus and others of the ancients. I doubt you can do away with such evidence. Methinks you must needs acknowledge yourself to be well beaten in this argument, for truly you are now at your last shifts."

"Nay, be not in such conceit of the matter," rejoined the first, in any manner rather than like one who suffereth defeat. "I was never so well off in my logic since the question was started. Now I will maintain, even at the stake, these my propositions, which I doubt not to make good with all proper weapons of rhetoric, and references of highest authority. First, the body hath a soul."

"Granted," said his companion.

"All souls are, therefore they exist."

"I let that pass."

"To exist, argueth to live, and to live requireth the proper sustenance of life."

"That hath to be proved," gravely remarked his opponent.

"Proved!" exclaimed the other, as if in a monstrous astonishment. "Is there anything that can live without victual? Have not all animals, whether of bird or beast, fish or insect, a natural commodity of mouth and stomach, whereby they are used to eat what pleaseth them?"

"There be sundry sorts of creatures who, it is credibly known, live without any manner of victual whatsoever," said his companion. "I pass over what is so notorious as the barnacle that is the fruit of a tree, therefore can require no feeding, yet is an animal with no deficiency of stomach or mouth; and the chameleon who is a beast, yet useth himself to no victual. I will say nought of the toad, that may live a hundred years shut up in the crevice of a rock. I will scarce so much mention the salamander, the phœnix, the cockatrice, and other familiar animals, which divers famous philosophers maintain do support themselves after a like fashion. But I will at once to the stronghold of my argument, which is, that ghosts have never been known to eat or drink even of the delicatest things that came in their way."

"By our lady I have great doubt of that," exclaimed the other; "hast forgot the ghost of the drunken tapster, that used to haunt the very cellar in which his corpse was discovered; and what should a ghost want in such a place think you, but to refresh himself with a draught of the good wine of which he had used to be so fond? Dost not remember how the spirit of a certain ancient housekeeper was known to walk the pantry of her master's house, and for what reasonable purpose could that be, save to feast on the store of delicacies she knew was there to be found? But there is a fresher and more convincing instance that happened at our college only last vacation to little Master Pipkin, the proctor. Now he and a certain lame doctor of divinity were sworn brothers. Dr. Polyglott was of an exceeding gravity, and as learned a scholar as Oxford could produce. It was said that he was at his books all day and all night, and that he liked nothing so well; but, in truth, he had a monstrous liking for roast pig with codling sauce, and this the proctor knew. So he asked the doctor to come and sup with him at an hour named, and he should have most choice feasting on this his favourite dish; and he having gladly assented, Master Pipkin got things in readiness. At the appointed time, the learned scholar hopped across the proctor's chamber towards the table much in the ordinary way, and feasted as he had never feasted before; but he looked graver even than he was wont to look, and spoke never a word the whole time he was engaged in devouring this delicate food. Nevertheless, this did not excite in his host any strange surmises, knowing his old friend to be given to fits of such deep thinking, he would not speak for hours, no matter what he might be about. But the strange greatness of his appetite did create a very singular marvelling in the proctor, for the learned scholar continued to fill his trencher, and to empty it with such frequency, that in the end the roast-pig was picked to the bones, and the codling sauce eat up to the last mouthful. As soon as this became manifest, Dr. Polyglott hopped out of the chamber as gravely as he had hopped into it. The next morning, little Pipkin called on his old friend, to inquire whether he had slept well after so heavy a supper, when, to his extreme horror, he learned that the poor doctor had been dead since noon the preceding day. Now it followeth from this, that the worthy doctor of divinity evinced his wonderful fine wisdom, in taking the opportunity to banquet on his favourite dish to the last morsel as he did, knowing that such delicacies as roast-pig with codling-sauce, the most fortunate of ghosts cannot hope to fall in with but rarely."

The youthful Shakspeare was somewhat amused at what he had heard, and presently he joined in the argument with as serious an earnestness as either, much to the marvel of the Oxford scholars, who thought it most wondrous, a plain countryman as he appeared, should talk so well and wisely. It was manifest he soon had the best of the argument. Indeed, he brought forth such convincing reasons, clothed in such brave language, that his opponents quickly got more into the humour of listening to his discourse, than of offering any speech of their own. Grave as he appeared, he was but entertaining of himself with their credulity.

"But concerning of ghosts, there is a thing that puzzleth me out of all telling," said he, in conclusion. "It cannot be for a moment supposed any person would be so heathenish ignorant, or so deplorable foolish, as to think such things are not to be met with—yet there is a matter connected with them that methinks goeth a great way towards such thinking, an' it be not properly explained by those having most knowledge of the subject. This I will here proceed to lay open to you, as I should be infinitely glad to be instructed by your opinion. Now, as far as the wisest philosophers have written, a ghost is immaterial, of no sort of substance, being but the mere shadow, as it were, of the body from which it hath been separated; and that none, save only man, who hath a soul, can come into the state that is commonly called being a ghost."

"Truly, sir, there can be no disputing anything so clearly put," observed one of the scholars.

"Now mark you this, my masters," continued the young traveller, with a more profound gravity; "there never yet was an instance of a ghost who appeared without proper apparelling—none so abominably ill-behaved as to shew himself deprived of clothing of every kind."

"Nay, so horrible improper a thing cannot be conceived of them," said the other.

"Indeed, I thought as much," added William Shakspeare. "Now there is a ghost of a person of worship seen, just as he used to be when he lived. How came he with a doublet? Garments have no souls as I have ever heard; and therefore neither hose nor trunks, nor cloaks, nor hats, nor apparel of any kind can be ghosts. And how can they be worn of a ghost being of substance as they must needs be, not being of the immaterial nature of a spirit? If the latter, as hath been credibly affirmed, can slide through the crack of a door with ease, there is no clothing of ever so fine a fabric but what cannot help staying behind at such time; and so leave the poor ghost without a thread to cover him. And when a ghost standeth before any person, his garments being heavy, and he so exceeding light, they must needs fall to his heels for lack of proper support,—to the horrible scandal of all decent spectators."

The Oxford scholars looked as perfectly puzzled as it was possible for any men to be; and evidently knew not what to say on so perplexing a matter, for they had wit enough to see there could be but two conclusions to such an argument, which were a sort of Scylla and Charybdis to the theory of ghosts; for if they would affirm ghosts went without clothing—seeing that none could be had of any material that would stay on a shadow for a single moment—they would put themselves against the best authorities that had writ or spoken on the subject, all of whom vouched for their being properly clad in ordinary tiring; and if they ventured to maintain garments might be of the same nature with ghosts, they by it expressed their conviction, that every article of apparel was possessed of a soul, which they knew to be a proposition so contrary to common sense, no sober person would allow of such a thing for a single instant. Doubtless the young traveller felt famous satisfaction at having brought these rare logicians to so complete a nonplus, for truly they seemed to have been struck with a sudden dumbness. At last one acknowledged that what had just been advanced, involved an argument the which had never been started before, and he was not then prepared to give it answer, as it required a monstrous deal of profound thinking, it was of so abstruse a nature; and the other followed with something to the same purpose; and presently they managed to turn the disputation into another channel.

In this way the whole party proceeded on their journey; the only variation being some of them would occasionally get out of the waggon and walk by the side of the waggoner, amongst whom the youthful Shakspeare might be found more frequently than any other, inquiring of him the names of the places they passed through, and of the fair mansions of persons of worship that lay within sight, for it was a most welcome relief to the former, after having been thoroughly tired of the humours of his companions, to delight himself with observing the beauties of the surrounding country, and the appearance of the different classes of persons he met on the road. Every face bore to him signs of a certain character, no two of whom seemed to be alike; and from these he could in his own mind, read the history, habits, and thoughts, of all he gazed on. Mayhap, a great portion of this was mere speculation—nevertheless, it served to beguile the time with a very fair entertainment.

"And what place come we to next, Master Giles?" inquired he of the waggoner.

"Oxford, an' it please ye," replied the man.

"Do we make any stay there?" asked the other.

"Ees, maister, we bide a whole night at comely Mistress d'Avenant's, at the Crown Inn," answered the waggoner, seemingly endeavouring to attend to his horses and his companion at the same time. "John D'Avenant hath just taken her to wife. Coom, Bess! put thee best leg forrard—do now, I prythee?—and I'se warrant ye she's as seemly a hostess as ever drew spigot. Mather-a-way!"

"Doubtless an hour or so with a pretty woman maketh your journey to be all the pleasanter," observed the young traveller.

"Doant it thoa!" exclaimed the man, with a grin that displayed a pair of jaws of extraordinary capaciousness. "Gogs wouns, maister! When it be my good hap to get me along-side the shafts o' so goodly sweet a creature as Mistress D'Avenant, I feels my heart for to pull stronger nor the best beast o' the whole team.—Gee-whut! get thee along, I tell thee!—and I takes it as daintily as a forehorse going down hill. Body o' me! when she bringeth me a pint o' tickle brain, and letteth her sloe-black eyes to rest upon me, whilst I be a fumbling o' the money out o'my leathern purse, I feels so dizzy, and so strange, and so full o' monstrous sweet pleasantness fro' top to toe, I've no more heed o' the waggon than the waggon has o' me."

"Methinks, by this, you must be in love with the good dame," said his companion jestingly. "But, surely you will not think of doing mine host of the Crown so ill a turn, as to be a loving of his wife when you stop at his house?"

"Wouldn't I thoa?" cried Giles, with an inexpressible sly wink of his somewhat roguish eyes, as he lifted his cap with his left hand and scratched his head, countryman fashion. "As far as I can guess, I doant take a waggoner to be any more free of temptation than another man, but if any manner of man whatsoever can come within the glance o' Mistress D'Avenant's sloe black peepers, and not think within himself how blessed would be his condition were he John D'Avenant, and John D'Avenant he—he must needs be such a mortal as be clean different from the ordinary sons of Adam."

This, and other conversation to the same purpose, excited some faint curiosity in the young traveller to behold her whose charms had made so forcible an impression on the susceptible heart of Master Giles; and this curiousness of his in due time was indulged. At their entrance into Oxford, which was at dusk of the evening, the two scholars left the waggon, and it proceeded leisurely along till it stopped in the yard of the Crown Inn. It was too dark to distinguish objects very clearly, but as far as could be judged of it, the inn was a capacious building well accommodated for its purposes. Lights were streaming from many casements, and the burthen of a popular ballad came in full chorus from one of them. A door being open, figures could be seen moving about in the red glare of the kitchen-fire; and on a cry being raised of "The waggon! the waggon! Here be Master Giles come, mistress!" two or three persons came rushing out.

"John! prythee make all speed to help the travellers out!" cried a female, who was approaching with a lighted candle, which she shaded with her hand.

"Ay, sweetheart! I'll be with thee on the instant," replied a young man coming after her, and then calling into the house, exclaimed—"Come Ralph! Come Robin! Wilt be all night a bringing of those steps?"

"Welcome to Oxford, good friends!" cried the first speaker, very pleasantly, as she appeared at the end of the waggon.

"Ha! Master Giles, how dost do?" said the other, cordially greeting the driver as an old acquaintance.

"Bravely, Master D'Avenant, bravely!" replied he. "And your fair mistress. Body o' me, an' she doant look more bloomingly than ever!"

"Marry, Master Waggoner! when am I to come to my full bloom, think you?" said the first speaker, with a pretty laugh, as she left him to pay attention to her new guests. William Shakspeare was assisting his fellow travellers to alight, but he could not help turning round to take note of this Mistress D'Avenant; and in honest truth he saw before him as delicious a face as any man need desire to see, with lustrous dark eyes, rich complexion, and a most bewitching mouth—glowing as it were, under the light thrown upon them by the candle, and ornamented with a becoming head-tire.

"Take him down gently, I pray you, good sir, for he is exceeding weak," said the tender mother, as the young traveller was helping her sick son out of the waggon.

"Truly, he shall be as tenderly handled as if his own kind mother were a helping him," replied he; this gentle speech of his brought on him the notice of the pretty hostess, who looked with a pleased surprise at beholding of so handsome manly a youth. In due time all had alighted. The Woodstock man had already departed. The mother and child, with the old dame, led the way—the latter, as usual, making herself wondrous gracious with the host; and the youthful Shakspeare walking last, by the side of his comely hostess, with whom he appeared already to be affording some pleasing entertainment, for she manifestly took his converse with infinite satisfaction. The waggoner stood behind, gazing after the last two as he scratched his head, with a look as though he had much rather Mistress D'Avenant had stayed where she was, or that her companion had come to any inn at Oxford save the Crown.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The trustiest, lovingest and gentlest boy
That ever master kept.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

The love of boys unto their lords is strange;
I have read of wonders of it. Yet this boy,
For my sake (if a man may judge by looks
And speech) would outdo story. I may see
A day to pay him for his loyalty.

IBID.

Ah! dere God! what mai this be
That alle thing weres and wasteth awai;
Frendschip is but a vanyte
Unnethe hit dures all a day.

VERNON MS.

Alas!
There are no more such masters; I may wander
From east to occident, cry out for service,
Try many, all good, serve truly, never
Find such another master.

SHAKSPEARE.

"WHAT dost think of my lord's new page?" inquired the grave old butler of the equally grave old housekeeper of the Lord Urban, as they sat together in a small chamber adjoining the buttery of the earl's mansion, taking of their morning repast.

"Truly a most well favoured youth and a gentle," replied the old dame. "I be hugely mistaken in him, good Adam, an' he be not of a most kindly disposition. Never saw I youth so courteous, and yet so humble withal. He is ever ready to do all manner of friendly offices to whoever he cometh anigh; and yet, of such humility as he seemeth, there is a look and behaviour with him that is manifestly much above the service he hath put himself upon."

"Ay, Joyce, that hath struck me more than once," observed Adam. "But there is another thing which I have observed in this Bertram, in which he differs greatly from youths of his own age, as far as I have seen—and this is, his constant refraining from all kinds of pastime. Despite of his apparent cheerfulness I cannot help thinking he hath some secret sorrow which he alloweth to prey on his gentle nature. I have not lived these years without acquiring some cunning in observing of faces; and I do detect in his such signs as assure me he is in no way happy."

"Perchance that shall make him the better company for my lord," said Joyce. "Indeed, they are so like in their humours, methinks they cannot help taking to each other with a mutual good will. It is evident the page loveth his lord, he speaketh of him so fondly, and attendeth on him with so affectionate a reverence; and as it appeareth to me, the earl is wonderfully partial to his young attendant, for he is never easy save when he is present."

"Truly I think so," added the old butler.

"I marvel he hath not come," observed the housekeeper.

"He tasteth nothing himself till his master hath sufficed himself," replied Adam; "and 'tis as pretty a sight as can well be seen, to note how, with what store of sweet persuasions, the page getteth his lord to partake of the dainties he setteth before him, till he hath made a fair meal. But here cometh his light footstep along the passage."

The next minute the youth who had been William Shakspeare's fellow traveller entered the chamber, clad like a page in the livery of the Lord Urban, with sword and dagger, much improved in his looks, though still of more delicate appearance than is common with one of his age. Courteously he saluted the two ancient domestics, in a manner as gentle as if they were his good parents rather than his fellow servants, and took his place beside them, accepting what they helped him to with abundance of thankfulness, and only regretting he should put them to such trouble. And this behaviour of his so took the hearts of old Adam and his companion, that they appeared as if they could not do half enough to shew how wondrously it pleased them.

"And how fareth our noble master, sweet sir?" inquired the housekeeper.

"He mends apace, good dame," replied the youth. "Indeed, I am now in hopes he may be got out altogether of his unhappy phrenzies and terrible sad fits of melancholy. Alack! 'tis a most grievous thing so noble a gentleman should be in so sad a case as he is!"

"Ah! that is it," exclaimed Adam, sorrowfully. "But dost know what great cause he hath had for such deep sadness?"

"Nay, not a word of it," answered Bertram; "nor am I in any way desirous to learn, unless my lord think it fit I should. I only know he is a most unhappy gentleman, and methinks that should be enough knowledge for me to strain my exertions to the utmost, to lead him into more pleasing feelings."

"I do famously approve of such discretion," said the old dame; and then, as was customary of her, recommenced pressing him to make a better meal. "Truly, never met I any person with such strange lack of appetite," she added, on finding her endeavours of no avail. "O' my word, you must not hope to attain any stoutness of flesh, go you on with so poor a stomach. But mayhap there are other things you might more relish. There is a fair portion of a roast kid now, cooked but yesterday, that would make most delicate eating for your breakfast, that I will get for you, please you to say you could fancy it—or I will have for you a tender pullet broiled on the instant, an' you tell me you have a mind for so nice a dainty."

"Indeed I thank you very heartily, I am well content with the excellent bountiful meal I have made," replied the page. Thereupon the old butler entreated him to make a more prodigal use of the ale on the table, or allow of his fetching him a cup of choice malmsey or canary: but the youth courteously thanked him, yet could not be induced to taste a drop more beyond what he had drank. Immediately after this, one of the grooms of the chamber came to tell Bertram his lord wanted him; upon which he made what haste he could towards that part of the building where the earl had chose to lodge himself. Whilst the youth is making his way through the long passages and broad staircases of this goodly mansion, the reader shall at once be transported to the Lord Urban's chamber.

It was a gloomy apartment of some dimensions, lighted only by a window of stained glass. On one side of it was a large bookcase, well stored with volumes of different sizes—the chimney-piece was carved all round with armorial bearings, in almost numberless different compartments—the chairs and couches were covered with the same dark tapestry as the panels, and the table in the centre bore a coverlet of some black stuff, ornamented with a deep border of the same colour. At the end of the chamber opposite the bookcase, on each side of the window, were two large portraits, in carved oak frames,—one a handsome young knight, in full armour, doubtless meant for the earl in his younger days; and the other was completely hid under a black cloth. There were two doors to this chamber, one of which was the entrance, and the other led into an antechamber where the page slept, and to the earl's bed-chamber, which was beyond it. There was no sign of living thing near, save a fine greyhound that was listlessly stretching himself by sliding his fore paws close together along the glossy flooring till they were thrust out their full length, and then he would make a faint sort of whining as he looked about and found himself alone.

Presently, a noise like the turning of a key was heard, which made the dog somewhat more attentive, but instead of looking towards either of the doors, his eyes were fixed in a different direction, and the next moment a concealed door was seen to open, and thereat, with exceeding cautiousness, the Lord Urban made his appearance, clad in a suit of black velvet, and looking as if moved with so monstrous a sadness no heart could live under it. After closing the door as cautiously as he had opened it, the earl flung himself into a couch, and, with an aspect of a most woeful sort, he fixed his eyes on the black curtain that covered the picture. All this while it was evident his mind was in great trouble. His lips would move and curl into strange expressions, far from pleasing; his eyes seemed to strain as if after some object that was fading from their sight, and then he would start back. His breast heaved, and his face grew clouded. He would frown till the wrinkles on his forehead appeared to be so pressed and squeezed together they must needs crack—and draw in his lips so long and strongly, his mouth disappeared under the beard of the lower part of it. The greyhound looked as though he had again composed himself to sleep; yet would he open his eyes and fix them on his master with a curious interest, at every start or sudden exclamation the earl made.

" 'Twas a rightful deed!" muttered the Lord Urban, in deep thick tones that spoke a far profounder meaning than the mere words conveyed. "'Twas a just vengeance! The greatly guilty should be greatly punished!" Presently a strong shuddering passed over him, and his aspect changed from a severe sternness to a painful melancholy. "'Twas a most infamous deed!" exclaimed the earl, in broken accents that were scarce audible; "a deed by which I have forfeited all reputation here, and hope hereafter. An unknightly deed—a cowardly deed—a most horrible base murder! Ha!" screamed the unhappy man, when, on raising his eyes, he met those of his page, upon whom he hastily rushed, and seized by the throat as though he were about to strangle him. "Dost come prying and listening, fellow! Nay—nay—" he added, as suddenly letting go the youth as he had laid hold of him. "I mean thee no hurt, boy!—O' my life, I will not harm thee. But why didst enter without knocking?"

"I knocked many times, my lord, but you answered me not," replied Bertram, with more sympathy in his looks than fear. "And you having sent for me pressingly, I made bold to enter without further delaying."

"Right, boy, right!" said his lord hurriedly. "I did send for thee I remember me well, and doubtless I was too deeply engaged in mine own thoughts to take any heed of thy knocking. But didst hear me say anything discreditable?—Aught to my disadvantage? Spoke I at all of——" The earl seemed as though the word choked him, for he could not speak it, and wrung the hand of his young attendant, which he had affectionately seized, when his humour changed from its sudden furiousness, and turned away.

"Alas, my lord, such I have heard too often to pay them any manner of heed," answered Bertram sorrowfully. "They are but the natural offspring of your phrenzy—that none who know you, and love you, would take, save as evidence of your exceeding unhappiness."

"And dost not believe I have committed such wrongful act as I have declared?" inquired the Lord Urban, again taking his page kindly by the hand, and looking into his face with a countenance of sadness mingled with affection.

"How could I credit so intolerable a thing?" exclaimed the youth. "Methinks the generous treatment I have received at your hands would suffice to plant your nobleness firmly in my opinion, but what I have seen of your other actions is of the like honourable character; and surely these common acts are the properest evidence to judge you by—against which the idle sayings of your distempered fancy can weigh only as a feather in the balance."

"True, boy, true," cried the earl, a faint smile making itself visible on his noble features, as he more tenderly pressed the hand he held in his own. "Such things must need be of my mind's disorder. I cannot be so horrible base a wretch as I do sometimes think myself. I do assure thee I have been in wonderful reputation of the noblest persons, for all truly famous and noble qualities. Indeed, I have been from my youth ready to cast aside every one thing most valued, rather than the slightest blemish should rest upon my honour.

Surely then it cannot be I should in a moment thrust away from me the fame I had laboured so long and well to acquire, and do so cruel a deed all men that knew it would cry shame."

"It is too improbable to be considered a moment, my lord," replied his young companion.

"And yet thou knowest not the provocation that may lead to such things," added his lord, with a more touching earnestness. "It seemeth to me the very honourablest sort of man may be maddened by wrong into the shewing of such notorious ill behaviour. Thou art too young to judge of this. Thou canst not yet enter into the feelings of a man who having attained the highest eminence of nobleness, in extreme confidence he shall so live and die, on a sudden findeth himself reduced to the lowest base abjectness, by one who was the last of all in his expectation to do him any evil."

"Truly, I never heard of so hapless a case," observed the page.

"Doubtless 'tis somewhat rare," said the earl. "But, prythee, get me a book and read. I would be amused out of this humour. Fetch the same goodly romance thou wert engaged upon yesterday." The page cheerfully did as he was required, believing, by so doing, he should beguile the earl of his unhappiness; and presently sitting himself in a chair with a huge volume in his lap, commenced reading of the marvellous adventures of certain famous knights. He soon got to be too much interested in the narrative to attend to his hearer, whom he fully believed to be as completely taken with the book as himself,—but such was far from being the case, for though the earl at first appeared attending to what was being read to him, in a few minutes it was evident, from the changed expression of his countenance, his mind was engrossed by a very different matter. A hollow groan at last forced the page to desist awhile from his reading.

The noble features of the earl now appeared black and distorted, as though under the influence of a great agony—his eyes with a sad fixedness staring at vacancy, and his hands clenching fast the arms of the chair on which he sat—his head leaning forward, one leg under the seat and the other projecting stiffly before him—in brief, the whole attitude as strained as a mere effigy of stone.

"Murder!" muttered he in the most thrilling tones Bertram had ever heard. "Oh, infamous! Oh, most base deed! Oh! intolerable foul blot upon mine honour! Nought can erase the stain. Reputation! thou art lost to me for ever! But who slandereth me? Who dare say ought to my discredit?" inquired he in a louder voice, and with a fierce frowning look. "Am I not Urban de la Pole? Urban the reproachless? 'Twas a just deed! Who dares proclaim it to be a murder?"

"My lord! my lord! I pray you out of this phrenzy!" exclaimed the page urgently, as he pushed his lord slightly on the shoulder to arouse him from his strange fancies. At this the latter started of a sudden, and grasped his young companion's arm with both his hands, staring upon him with a somewhat bewildered gaze.

"Ha! what dost say, boy?" hastily inquired he, just above his breath, as it were.

"I beseech you, my lord, not to allow of these violent terrible fits to get so much the better of you," replied Bertram, in a most earnest voice, and with a look of deepest sympathy. "Believe me, there is no one person anywhere nigh unto you, who would breathe one word but to your well-deserved praise. It grieveth me to the heart to see so noble a gentleman so moved. I marvel such gloomy shadows, the mere cheats of a disordered mind, should have such power over your excellent sweet nature."

"I do believe thou lovest me, boy," said the earl, taking the other's hand in his wonted kind manner.

"Ay, that do I, right heartily, my lord!" exclaimed the youth, with a most convincing sincerity. "I love you for your truly noble character—such as I have heard from divers of your honest faithful servants—for the greatness of your heart and honourableness of your conduct—as shewn in a long career of truly glorious deeds—for your bountiful generousness of disposition to every distressed poor person of whose wants you can gain intelligence;—and I love you for your noble behaviour to myself—the very creature of your prodigal kindness—whom you have saved from the horriblest evils humanity can endure. You found me with nought else to recommend me to your notice but the desperateness of my state. You took charge of me, attended me as a dear friend rather than a master; gave back to me the health which long suffering had deprived me of; and the home that villany had forced me from; and yet, with the full confidence of a perfect honourable nature, up to this hour you have afforded me all the succour I needed, without asking me one word of the cause that brought me into such necessity. I might not be the thing I seemed—perchance, one quite unworthy of your smallest esteem; but out of your own abundant goodness, you found me such qualities as I most needed, and took me into your service, without trial, question, or doubt. Truly, my lord, methinks you have given me great cause to love you."

"I bless the hour I met thee in the wood," said the Lord de la Pole, with affectionate earnestness. "I have received more comfort of thy untiring heed of me than have I known, I scarce can say the day when, it seemeth so long since. I will prove anon how much I do esteem thy loving service."

"I care to have but one proof, an' it please you, my lord," said Bertram, "and that is what I have been labouring for to gain all this time."

"Ay, indeed? Prythee say what it is?" asked the earl.

"It is but to have you return to the gallant activity and proper cheerfulness shewn by you in times past," replied his young companion. At hearing this the Lord Urban shook his head mournfully.

"Ah, boy, that can never be!" said he, with a deep sad emphasis that went direct to the hearer's heart.

"Try, my lord, I beseech you," added the other imploringly. "Hie you to court, and doubt not the example of your nobleness would be of especial advantage to every gallant spirit that shall there be found. Take your proper place among the powerfulest lords of the realm, and be ever ready to afford them that counsel which your experience teacheth you—or be as you have so often been before, the valiant leader of the chivalry of England, bearing your resistless banner into the very heart of the battle."

"Ay, talk of these things, boy—talk of them as long as thou wilt!" exclaimed the earl, as a gleam of proud triumph seemed shining in his eyes. "I was not always as I am. There hath been many a hard fought field wherein my spear and curtle-axe have done notable service. Those were glorious days,—those were gallant scenes. The neighing of the war steed, as he rusheth to the conflict at the piercing cry of the trumpet, soundeth in my ears even now,—and the waving pennons, and the glittering lances, and the resistless rush of knights and men-at-arms, again return to mine eyes. I feel stirred in every vein. Methinks I could seek the enemy with all the valour of my early manhood, and raise the same resounding war cry that hath made the fiercest of the battle to rage around me wherever I passed."

"Ay, that could you, my lord, I would wager my life on it!" cried the page, delighted beyond measure to notice such a humour in the earl. "England hath still enemies to subdue—and there yet remain for her gallant defenders many hard fought fields to be won. Would you remain in inglorious ease when the foes of your country are striving for her overthrow, and give yourself up to a vain grief when the dangers that threaten the land require you to the rescue? I beseech you, free yourself from the trammels of your sorrow—don your favourite armour—bestride your choicest steed—call to your standard the old companions of your valour, and speed wherever glory is to be gained or wrong redressed; and be assured that not only shall the greatness of your fame exceed your former reputation, wherever your name can be heard, but that you shall enjoy such content, such marvellous comfort, and such wonderful sweet happiness, as have never visited you all your life before."

"Ah boy, thou knowest nothing of what I have endured," answered the Lord Urban, and to his companion's exceeding discontentation, manifestly in as complete a sadness as ever. "Thou speakest in entire ignorance, else wouldst thou have refrained from so perfect a mockery as speaking to me of happiness. Be sure, that were I not held to this spot by a chain, from which nought but the grave can release me, long ere this I would have sought in the thickest of the enemy a death, by which my name might obtain that honour which hath been denied to my life. Comfort!" exclaimed he, in tones scarce articulate, as he let go the hand he had held so long. "Prythee, speak not to me such a word again;" and, so saying, he rose from his seat, and slowly traced his way out of the chamber.

Bertram gazed after him, with eyes full of the tenderest solicitude, and remained for some moments after his lord had disappeared, in a deep reverie of thought.

It may be taken as an invariable truth, that a truly honourable mind is ever a confiding one, and taketh every fair appearance to be what it resembles. Doubt and suspicion belong only to the meaner sort. Those whose intentions are thoroughly honest put the fullest confidence in the dealings of their associates; and when once opinion getteth to be fixed in them of another's worthiness, a prejudicial thought finds such difficulty of entrance to their unsuspecting minds, that it requireth some extraordinary evidence before it will be entertained. Thus was it with this youth. Of his lord's nobility of character he had formed so strong a conviction, from what he had heard and seen of him, that such a thing as suspecting him of a dishonourable action, was utterly beyond the bounds of possibility; therefore, all the earl's self-accusations and dark allusions the other could only treat in the manner already described, as distempered fantasies arising from the gloomy melancholy in which he had indulged, as the page had heard, since the death of his countess.

And thus it went on for many months, the faithful Bertram striving all he could to win the earl from the terrible sorrow with which, as it seemed to him, his lord was afflicted; and ever imagining he was succeeding in his endeavours, till some violent fit of frenzy would make its appearance in the object of his grateful love, and prove how little he had gained by his affectionate painstaking. He had observed, with some marvelling, that when he had left the earl for any length of time in the chamber that served for his library, on his return he was sure to find him, either gloomily abstracted, or in some violent excitement. Sometimes, long fits of dreadful self-reproach would follow, and at others, he would fiercely insist he had done a right thing. In the end, he was sure to relapse into his customary sadness, from which it was with exceeding difficulty he was thoroughly roused. It chanced to hap, that wanting Lord de la Pole on one occasion, to acquaint him with something he had forgot, Bertram returned to the library, where he had left him a few minutes since, and not finding him there, there waited, believing the earl had retired to his bed-chamber.

Finding his lord's stay was longer than he anticipated, he took up a book and sat himself down. He had not been long engaged in reading, when he heard a noise close to him, and glancing towards the spot whence it proceeded, to his exceeding wonder, beheld a portion of the book-case open like a door, and immediately after, the earl enter the chamber by its means, and close it carefully after him. It was manifest the Lord Urban had no expectation of finding his page where he was at that time; for, on the instant he caught sight of him, he started with a sudden exclamation of surprise, and his look was angry, and his manner more severe towards Bertram than ever the youth had known it to be.

"How darest thou come here unbid?" exclaimed the earl, as with folded arms he regarded his youthful companion with a stern scrutiny. "Dost seek to pry into my secret? Have I then all this time been but encouraging a pitiful spy, who laboureth to thrust his curiousness into my most hidden affairs, that he might betray me to the world?"

"My lord! my lord! believe me, I never entertained so base a thought," replied the page, much affected his lord should think so ill of him.

"Wilt promise never to divulge what thou hast seen?" inquired the Lord de la Pole, with increased earnestness.

"In very truth, my lord, I never should have mentioned it to any person living if I thought you sodesired," said the other.

"Swear it!" cried the earl, suddenly grasping his companion firmly by the wrist, seemingly violently agitated. "Down on thy knees and swear by all thy hopes of happiness here and hereafter, thou wilt hint to none there is other entrance to this chamber save those with which all are acquainted." The page knelt as he was desired, and repeated, as his companion stood sternly over him, the form of the oath he was required to take.

"As heaven is my witness, you need no oaths to bind me to your will," urgently exclaimed the youth.

The earl appeared scarcely satisfied even by this solemn security he had exacted. He was still shewing most undeniable signs he was terribly influenced by some dark passion, for anger flashed from his eyes, and distrust appeared in every feature of his countenance; his breathing was hard and loud, and at every gasp of breath his breast heaved as though it would force its fastenings.

"Be assured, my lord, I am your obedient poor servant, and would die rather than betray any secret you might entrust me with," continued the other. "But it grieveth me to the heart you should think so ill of me. I could bear anything rather than you should doubt of my entire allegiance. Other friend than you I have none in the wide world, and therefore what could induce me to play the traitor to your confidence. I beseech you, my lord, put away so ungracious a thought. As I trust in God's mercy, I have done nought to merit it."

"Well, well, boy, perchance I have been too hasty," replied the earl, somewhat moved by the touching earnestness of the youth's speech. "But never stay in this chamber, even for a minute, when I am not present. I should have told thee of this, my desire, sooner, but it never struck me there would be necessity for it."

The promise was cheerfully made, and the Lord Urban's customary kindness returning, all trace of unpleasantness speedily vanished from both.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Should we disdain our vines because they sprout
Before their time? Or young men if they strove
Beyond their reach? No; vines that bloom and spread
Do promise fruit, and young men that are wild
In age grow wise.

GREENE.

Chloris, farewell! I now must go,
For if with thee I longer stay,
Thy eyes prevail upon me so
I shall prove blind and lose my way.
Fame of thy beauty and thy youth,
Among the rest me hither brought:
Finding this fame fall short of truth
Made me stay longer than I thought.

WALLER.

Prince Henry. Where shall we take a purse to-morrow, Jack?
Falstaff. Where thou wilt, lad. I'll make one; an' I do not, call me a villain and baffle me.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE best room at the Crown Inn at Oxford was filled with noisy boisterous students, most of whom were seated at a long table covered with drinking vessels, at the top of which was no other person than William Shakspeare, for whom, indeed, all had assembled. The two scholars that had been his fellow travellers in the waggon, spread amongst their acquaintance of their different colleges, the fame of the young countryman who had so charmed them with his eloquent sweet rhetoric, and this presently brought whole companies of students to see this marvellous person. They were so delighted with his ready wit and admirable perfect knowledge of all manner of subjects, that they increased his reputation so over the university, the dwelling of John D'Avenant, large as it was, could scarce contain the wonderful great press of guests that flocked into it. Doubtless this made the cause of such famous custom to be in especial liking with mine host—but independent of these considerations, he could not help relishing his guest's society, it was so full of cheerful ease and pleasant humour; and as for mine hostess, if there existeth any language in a pair of lustrous dark eyes, she did discourse to him right eloquently of the favour in which he was held by her.

Doubtless these latter would gladly enough have kept their young guest where he was, but he had expressed his determination to start for London the following morning, and this becoming known, the scholars must needs give him a parting entertainment, and therefore were they crammed so thick in that chamber. Divers were thronging up to the head of the table, wine cup in hand, to pledge him, and there was a monstrous shaking of hands and shouting of good will: others were talking across the table, or leaning over others to claim the attention of a distant fellow student. Mistress D'Avenant was attending to her numerous guests as well as she could, now listening with pretty coquetry as one of the mad youths retained her by the hand, as he whispered something in her ear, which was sure to be followed by a box of his own from the comely woman, though not one that argued any great spitefulness, and the offender would laugh as if he had performed some exquisite mischief; and presently answering the numberless sweet compliments, which poured on her from every side, with some sprightly jesting speech, which appeared to put every hearer into a sudden ecstacy.

A party had got hold of her husband in a corner, and were trying him with all the forms of pleading used in a court of justice, and he appeared to take the jest very pleasantly, defending himself with what wit he had, and leaving his case to the merciful consideration of his judges. Another party in another corner were dancing of a measure to their own singing. Such a curious hum of voices surely hath rarely been heard before. Sometimes the speeches were in Latin, and at others English. Here was shouted the fag end of a macaronic verse, there the well known burthen of a popular ballad; and this was mingled with a din of cries for more wine to the drawers; a knocking of cups and flasks to attract the attention of their companions, and peals of laughter so long and loud it would often outdrown every other noise.

"Will Shakspeare! Will Shakspeare!" bawled several of the revellers at the table.

"What wouldst, my hearts of oak?" replied their companion, almost hid amongst the throng of laughing, riotous scholars, who had left their seats the better to enjoy his admirable jests.

"Prythee heed not those knaves of Baliol," said a round faced stout little fellow at his elbow, who made himself the noisiest and merriest of the whole party.

"'Knaves of Baliol,' thou Brazen-nose calf," exclaimed, from the other end of the table, a tall youth with long hair, and a nose that served his associates as a peg to hang their jests upon, it was of so unusual a length. "Away with thee, thou cinnamon rogue! What, because thou art a lord, shalt thou call names? Though thou lookest so merry, thou art but a sorry lord. I would carve a lord out of a piece of ginger, and he should give a nobler flavour to a bowl of toast and ale, than wouldst thou to a butt of malmsey."

"Out on thee," replied the young nobleman. "Truly thou art a famous carver, for thou hast carved thy nose to a fine point. I would I could say as much for thy wit: and thou hast monstrous need of ginger, for there shall be found more savour in a dry biscuit than can be got out of thee after ever such pressing."

"Nay, press him not too hard, I prythee," said another, whose face appeared as red as though it would have outglowed the rising sun. "At so social a meeting I should not like to see any bones broke."

"What dost say, thou salamander?" cried the scholar of Baliol, somewhat incensed at this sly allusion to his poorness of flesh. "Go and cool thy red hot aspect in the river, it causeth the whole place to feel like an oven, it burneth so terribly."

"As I live he will make the place too hot to hold thee, anon," observed a companion, mischievously. "If thou wouldst not have us all roasted alive, blow not on him, good Martlemas."

"Pooh," exclaimed he of the red face. "The nose of such a bellows must needs carry too small a wind to inflame me."

"My nose in thy teeth, fellow!" cried Master Martlemas, in a rage.

"I thank thee very heartily, but I want not so delicate a tooth-pick," drily replied the other, to the infinite amusement of his companions.

"O' my life, have I got amongst a party of cunning limners, my masters," here exclaimed William Shakspeare, good humouredly. "Never saw I such cleverness in taking off features." The laughter which followed this conceit, restored every one to an amicable pleasantness on the instant; but such choice spirits could never keep together a moment, without a trial of their young wits, and therefore no opportunities were allowed to pass in which one could aim his weapon at another.

"Sweet Mistress D'Avenant!" whispered a handsome youth, as he caught his hostess round the waist as she was passing him. "By those two lustrous stars of love, I swear I have a most infinite affection for thee. Contrive for me a private meeting, I will give thee good proof of it."

"Canary, did you say, my lord?" inquired the pretty woman aloud, with a provoking indifferent aspect, as she glided out of his embrace—much to the dissatisfaction of the enamoured noble.

"Hither my delectable, dainty Hebe!" cried another close at hand. "Brew us another pottle of Sack, and look thy sweetest the while—I warrant it shall want no sugar."

"O' my word, I would it were so, Master Lamprey," said Mistress D'Avenant archly. "I could make conserves with little trouble and small expense; and who knows but in time I should attain to such exceeding skill in the producing of sweet subtleties, I might have an Oxford scholar or two done in sugar."

"Make choice of me, I prythee, for thy first experiment," murmured one at her elbow. "I would give thy tempting lips most delicious entertainment."

"Methinks you are sweet enough upon me as it is," replied the pretty hostess, in the same merry humour. "But I care not to make a trial of you provided you allow yourself—as it is necessary in such cases—to simmer over a good fire till you are reduced to a proper consistence, and I have scum off of you every portion of what grossness you have." This speech was followed by the hearty laughing of all within hearing of it, for the person to whom it was addressed was far stouter of flesh than any in the room—indeed, he was of a singular corpulence for his years.

"Prisoner at the bar!" cried one, with a famous mock seriousness, who acted as judge in the little court who had been trying their host. "After a long and most impartial trial, you have been condemned by a jury of good men and true, on the testimony of divers most approved witnesses, whose evidence hath not been shaken one little by your defence, to be a most notorious traitor and horrible offender against a certain very just and proper law, made and provided for the express comfort of this good city of Oxford—to wit, that all the comeliest damsels within a circuit of five miles more or less, are and ever must be wards of the very worshipful the scholars of the University, with whom can no man living contract a marriage, without first obtaining their privity and consent. You, John D'Avenant, have dared wickedly to seek after the truly excellentest fairest creature that ever deserved to be in such covetable wardship, and, with a most monstrous horrible vilany that all honest men must needs stand aghast at, you have taken her to wife against the law aforesaid, and against the inclinations of divers honourable members of the very worshipful gentlemen scholars, who desired her for their own particular delectation.

"Silence in the court there!" shouted the judge as if in a terrible seriousness, for many were taking the jest very merrily. "Master Attorney, I am shocked to see you so behave yourself at so awful a moment."

"My lord, I humbly beg pardon," answered a merry varlet, who seemed to be doing all he could to keep in his laughing; but the jests and mirthful behaviour of certain of the jury and his brother counsellors, were such as might provoke the mirth of a more serious man.

"Prisoner at the bar!" continued the judge, waxing more ludicrously solemn as he proceeded. "It becometh to be now my painful duty to pass on you your sentence. Hope not for mercy, for, methinks, guilt such as yours ought to expect none. I grieve to see so young a person, and one of otherwise good character, take to the doing of so insufferable an offence. But it is evident you have lacked good counsel abominably. Had you sought myself now, previous to your marriage with that exquisite sweet creature, I doubt not it would have been to both our contents. I would have paved the way for your obtaining your honest desires, in such a manner that you should have done nothing unlawful.

"Master Attorney!" cried the judge, with a notable grave dignity, as a roar of laughter broke from that unlawyer-looking person, "see I any more of this unseemly conduct, I'll commit you for contempt." Then he added, turning to the culprit, who strove all he could to keep a serious countenance, though with but an imperfect success, "John D'Avenant, it would be but a proper punishment of your horrible crime to pass on you the extreme sentence of the law, but, in consideration of this being your first offence, and out of regard for your youth and inexperience, I make this your sentence—Your wife shall be kissed before your face, and you shall yourself appoint the person to execute that punishment. Officers, keep fast the doors."

In a moment some hastened to prevent Mistress D'Avenant's escape, and others crowded round her husband, recommending themselves as capital executioners who would do their office neatly, with as little pain as need be. The uproar of voices was greater than ever, and nothing but shouting and laughing prevailed all over the chamber. The young husband, who was rather of a more careless idle humour than was proper for one in his vocation, though he never took so much heed of his handsome wife as was necessary, liked not these wild scholars to be over familiar with her, and he would, if he could, have done away with the sentence; but he knew full well the sort of characters he had to deal with, and that there was nothing for it but to submit with a good grace. A thought suggested itself to him that it was better his wife should be caressed by a stranger who was not like to see her again, than by one who would remain in the neighbourhood, and might perchance seek opportunities for obtaining a repetition of such pleasure—therefore, to the importunities of those by whom he was surrounded, he presently named William Shakspeare as the person who should fulfil the sentence.

Amid all this din and very Babel-like confusion of tongues, the young traveller had been engaged in an interesting discussion with one or two kindred minds he had discovered amongst the mass, but when he was called on to do the duty assigned him, he rose nothing loath, and entered into the spirit of the jest very readily. In a very short time the busy laughing scholars cleared the table for to be the place of execution, and a certain divinity student there present, was appointed to be the prisoner's ghostly comforter, and to preach a sermon on the subject, for the edification of all present—at the conclusion of which the sentence was to be carried into effect.

"Truly, my masters, these are most sad doings," exclaimed Mistress D'Avenant, who was fast held by two young men, who took upon themselves the duty of constables. "I marvel you should behave so uncivilly against a poor woman who hath done no ill to any of you." Thereupon, the judge very gravely told her that the course of justice must not be perverted for the favouring of any individual; and the preacher commenced a famous lecture on the duty every person oweth to those put in authority over them. In this way she was brought to stand in the centre of the table—her husband at a short distance, also held by two scholars, with the preacher at his elbow, bidding him repent of his sins for his time was come—William Shakspeare close by, gravely asking of his pardon, swearing he bore him no malice, but did his terrible office because he was bound by his duty so to do; and the judges, assisted by the sheriffs and constables that stood upon the stools round the table, were commanding silence from their riotous mad-cap companions on the floor.

Then the preacher began his sermon, and such a sermon as he then delivered had never been heard there or any where else. He started with endeavouring to prove the necessity there was for the furtherance of the public morals, that learned persons should possess and keep in their charge all comely maidens of a tender age,—for they being wiser than any other class, had alone the discretion necessary for the proper bringing up of such gentle creatures. No doctrine was ever considered half so orthodox; but the preacher seemed inclined to put it beyond the possibility of cavil, for he presently fell to quoting divers of the Fathers—brought forward long passages from the writings of the most famous theologians, and referred to what had been laid down on the subject by the Council of Trent, and in various bulls published by the most influential of the Romish pontiffs; and this was done with so earnest a seriousness, that many did imagine that such things had really been said and written.

"Oh, fine preacher!" cried one.

"Thou shalt be a bishop, Sir Topas!" exclaimed another.

"Marry, thou wouldst convert a dead Indian, thou speakest so movingly," added a third. Others compared him to Peter the Hermit, and some questioned him, how he stood affected towards martyrdom—he appeared so fit for it. But the preacher went on as gravely as he could, and then alluded to the unhappy man who had fallen under the vengeance of offended justice, and begged the prayers of all good Christians in his behalf, seeing that he was about making amends for the wrong he had done, through punishment by the secular arm. Then he recommended the culprit to their charitable thoughts with such a monstrous earnestness—drawing so pitiful a picture of the terrible sufferings he was about to undergo—that the hearers fell to wailing and weeping most woefully.

"Alack, that any man should come to so miserable an end!" moaned Master Lamprey.

"And one that sold such brave liquor, too!" cried Master Martlemas, in still more doleful accents.

Then the preacher concluded with a famous exhortation to his auditory ever to bear in mind the notable example now set before them; and having gained from the culprit that he confessed the justice of his sentence, and was ready to meet his punishment, master sheriff called forward the executioner to do his duty without delay; whereupon William Shakspeare readily stepped up to Mistress D'Avenant, who looked as though she had not made up her mind whether to make a struggle or take the matter quietly.

"I pray you, most sweet hostess, to pardon this my compulsory duty," said the executioner, as seriously as any of them. "I assure you, were I not bound by a superior power, I would not do it—at least I would not do it so publicly—I would spare you all this painful exposure. I would, believe me."

"Away with you! O' my word, 'tis a shame you should play such a jest upon me," answered Mistress D'Avenant, as she made some shew of struggling, but it was of so slight a sort that very little sufficed to overcome it, and the next minute every one had demonstration the awful sentence of the law had been carried into effect. This was followed by shouts of triumph from some, and cries of condolence by others, to the now liberated husband and wife; and, in a short time after, the whole party again found their places at the table, and were jesting, drinking, and laughing as famously as ever. Mistress D'Avenant scolded her partner right eloquently, for allowing of such scandalous behaviour, and mine host assured her he would gladly have helped it if he could; but she did not seem to be quite comforted with such excuses—for all which, it was confidently believed by some, she was not the least pleased of the company.

All at once there was a great cry for William Shakspeare to sing them a song. This he had already done several times, so much to the delight of his hearers, that they seemed as though they could never have enough of such delicious minstrelsy; nevertheless they promised, would he favour them with one more, they would be content. After requesting their indulgence for a simple ditty—the only thing he could at the present moment call to his mind—he sang the following verses; the noisy scholars the whilst hushed to as complete a peace as if none were in the chamber.

A SONG OF FRIENDSHIP.

"Sweet friends! let Pleasure's social law,
Our souls to genial thoughts dispose,
For life's rich stream doth freely thaw,
And bloom and sun smile where it flows.
'Tis now with us the budding May,
From nature's bank let's freely borrow.—
Around our maypole dance to-day,
Our fates may make us pipe to-morrow.

"Dear friends! the rosy morn is ours
To sport away: the hunt is up!
But crown your game with twin-like flowers—
The brimming heart and brimming cup.
Now Phœbus glows through all the east,
And joy, our lord, hath banish'd sorrow;
Then haste to take his welcome feast—
Our fates may make us fast to-morrow.

"Brave friends! let Time no vantage gain,
Entrench your camp, your wants provide;
Whilst Youth and Love your fight sustain,
You may for years his siege abide.
As friendly looks shed round their light,
From star or moon you need not borrow;
Enjoy them while they shine to-night—
Our fates may quench their beams to-morrow."

Universal were the plaudits which followed the conclusion of William Shakspeare's singing, and well deserved were they too, out of all doubt; for in the belief that this was the last night he should see the friendly company around him, he put such expression into the words as could have been produced by no other. Perchance the greater portion of his new acquaintances saw in him only an exceeding pleasant person, but he was regarded in a much more brilliant light by some two or three present; whom, with that unerring sympathy which leadeth great minds to their fellows, he had singled out from their more noisy companions, to shew to them somewhat of his true nature. As they listened to the thrilling eloquence of his language, and perceived how pregnant it was with new and profound meanings, they did marvel exceedingly; and as the natural nobility of the man developed itself before their amazed glances, there entered into their hearts a loving reverence—the worship of true greatness among kindred natures—they had never felt during their whole lives. It was far into the evening before the party broke up, and it ended with abundance of noisy good wishes from the thoughtless many; and earnest hopes of again meeting, from the discerning few.

When the young traveller rose in the morning to continue his journey, he found Mistress D'Avenant in a chamber by herself, putting his things together ready for his taking with him. She was a woman as far superior in mental as she was in personal endowments to persons in her sphere of life; for her natural strong mind had been carefully cultivated; and possessed of such gifts, she was the very sort of woman that would most appreciate a man so prodigally garnished with admirable qualities as was her youthful guest. Her marriage had not been one of affection, and her husband quickly proved himself a person whose weakness of character she could hold in no esteem. Her superior intellect soon exerted its proper influence, which he very readily acknowledged, leaving his affairs to her entire management, whilst he sought for nothing but the enjoyment of his thoughtless pleasures; but such conduct still more lessened her respect of him; and when she beheld the manly disposition of William Shakspeare, and caught glimpses of the marvellous noble mind with which it was accompanied, she could not help wishing Heaven had blessed her with so choice a husband. As for the young traveller, he could not avoid seeing and admiring the extraordinary capacity his beautiful hostess evinced in such converse as he had with her, and the extreme perfectness with which she fulfilled her household duties; and more than once he found himself making comparisons between such estimableness, and the neglectful and obstinate behaving of his vain and ignorant wife, whereby the latter's unworthiness was shewn in most glaring colours. At the end, he would grieve he had not met with so excellent rare a partner as had John D'Avenant.

Having now been staying at the Crown several days, on a footing of the completest intimacy, he had ample opportunity for increasing the admiration he felt for his charming hostess; and she, getting more knowledge of his notable excellences, laid herself out to please him as she could. It was a dangerous situation for two young persons, so admirably gifted in mind and person, and so unhappily accommodated in marriage, to be placed in. Each could not help desiring to be well esteemed of the other, as the best token they could have of their own worthiness; and neither could avoid holding the other first in their esteem, their qualities were so much more estimable than those of any person of their acquaintance. Both had had but little sleep this last night, through continual thinking of the approaching separation; and, earlier than usual, Mistress D'Avenant left her husband sleeping off the effects of his evening revelling, to prepare for the departure of her youthful guest. When the latter made his appearance before her, there was a tear upon the long lashes of her dark eyes, but she speedily commenced affecting her customary cheerfulness; and he too, merely addressed her with his ordinary gallantry; yet, in their hearts the while, there were feelings as different to their outward conduct, as is light to darkness.

For all this show of indifference, neither could conceal from the other the extent to which they were feigning. The trifling speech which kept so carefully to all manner of matters of little moment, as it had never done before, grew less and less, and then came to brief sentences, spoken with tremulousness, till, for a time, words would fail them altogether; and the careless manner of their behaviour, gradually left them for an evident restlessness, and such listless doing of their occupations, as bore witness to the extreme confusion of their thoughts and feelings. Mistress D'Avenant was putting the last knot to the little bundle of things her companion had brought with him, and she was engaged upon it with so extraordinary a care, pulling it to a proper tightness, and smoothing the folds of the bundle, as though she could never satisfy herself with her work; and William Shakspeare close beside her, was putting on his left-hand glove, so deliberately, and with such prodigious heed that every finger should fit well into the leather, as if such a thing was an affair only to be attempted with the attentiveness of a matter of vital importance. As these things were doing, their hearts were beating high and wildly, and each felt the scarce endurable struggle of the powerfulest impulses of humanity labouring for a free existence. "Well, this must needs do," said Mistress D'Avenant, with a great effort, as she placed the little bundle near her guest.

"Oh, it will do exceeding well," gratefully replied he, giving it a hasty glance. He appeared to have got his glove on to his liking, or rather, he thought like his fair companion, the time was now come for action. He held out his ungloved hand before her, and forced a faint smile into his handsome countenance.

"It is full time I should be on my journey," he added, hurriedly; "so now I must take my leave of you." She seized his hand with a very desperate grasp, as it were, her own trembling all the while; and looked up into his eyes with a glance, whereof the expression baffleth all my powers of description—it was so imploringly tender. He continued, "I cannot attempt to thank you for the very bountiful sweet kindness you have shewn unto me, since it hath been my good hap to dwell beneath this roof; but, believe me, the memory of it cannot pass away, as long as my grateful nature beareth any token of thought, feeling, and life."

"Oh, sir, methinks it scarce deserveth any mention;" replied his beautiful hostess, with such emphasis, as words have only when they come direct from the heart, "Had I been a thousand times more attentive to your desires, I could not, in mine own opinion, have done for you one half sufficient. But you are going. I just begin to learn how to appreciate your inestimable excellences, when you hurry yourself away; and, perchance, I may never have sight of you again."

"O, my life, sweet Mistress D'Avenant, I will not allow that to be, for my own sake!" exclaimed her companion. "Be assured, I know the infinite worth of the treasure I leave behind me too well, to neglect it: and of whatever I most covet of Fortune, a speedy return to, and a long continuance of your generous behaviour, have the first place. My only fear is, my poor name may be too speedily forgotten."

"Never, Master Shakspeare!" cried the beautiful woman, earnestly, "truly I must be dead to every sense of goodness, when my memory faileth me on so goodly a subject. Believe me, in future times, I will look back upon the days I have known you as the very sunniest of my existence; and might I have any hope of such enjoyment again, I could endure my miserable state with a proper patience. Go, sweet sir, since it must needs be. I mistake you, hugely, if you can think ill of me at my now adding, you take with you all that I can deem of most sterling preciousness in this world."

"Dear Mistress D'Avenant! assure yourself I will essay all means to deserve such honourable opinion," replied he, much touched by this proof of confidence in his integrity; "what my feelings are for you I cannot trust myself to express; and yet nothing is so true as that their whole tendency is to hold you as a pattern of everything that is noblest in woman."

Thus parted the youthful Shakspeare and the lovely Mistress D'Avenant; and soon after he was once more a traveller, trudging his way manfully along the high road with his little burthen on his shoulder—his thoughts looking towards Oxford and his steps directed in the way of London. Hitherto his journey had been productive of infinite profit to him in getting acquainted with the humours of men—his favourite study; but his stay at the great university had been prodigiously to his entertainment, for he visited every college, and examined every building, with an especial veneration for their learned character, and a particular delight in their historical associations. As he proceeded on his journey his mind dwelt delightedly on the events of the preceding days, till it, as last, fixed itself with a truly marvellous pleasure, on the handsome young hostess of the Crown Inn. He could not have avoided observing how unsuitable to such a woman was her husband; and it was too apparent to him that her situation was far from pleasing to her. To be as tenderly esteemed of so admirable a creature, as she had given him reason to believe he was, gave him, with an inexpressible sweet pleasure, a peculiar pride in himself, for he—in the true spirit of nobleness which influences the high-minded man when he findeth himself beloved by a worthy woman—looked upon it as the chiefest honour his humanity could attain; and, beyond all doubting, there is nothing of which true manhood should be so proud; and when, as in this instance, a woman, so unhappily circumstanced, sheweth herself to be above all petty prejudices and selfish cares, and declareth her feelings in fullest confidence, believing their cause and their tendency to be too exalted to produce any base conclusions, the man must be a disgrace to the name he bears, if he do not feel himself as proud a creature as may be found in the whole world.

A being so well-disposed as was William Shakspeare, most assuredly would appreciate such conduct at a price beyond all telling. Now, filled as he was by the thrilling impulses of early manhood, when a sympathy for what is loveable stirs in every vein, he was peculiarly open to favourable impressions from the other sex, but his sense of good which so completely had the custody of his affections, exerted over him a higher power, and were directed to better purposes, than could any mere admiration; and whilst it threw open his mind and heart to chamber worthily the excellence of beauty, it kept for them there a still more honourable lodging for the beauty of excellence. He felt, the whilst, a motive free from selfish considerations, for hitherto he had sought but for to raise himself and those belonging to him; but now he would seek his exaltation rather as a pedestal to place another's goodness at its summit. Mistress d'Avenant, in her avowal, had exhibited that fearlessness, which those only know, who, whatever may be their situation, are under the noblest influences. A meaner nature so circumstanced would have sought to hide her feelings, and exhausted the artillery of feminine dissimulation ere she would have allowed them to be known; but in such a disposition, those feelings would have argued a weakness and, perchance, have led to a crime, whilst in the other, they were an undeniable evidence of strength, and, more than any other thing, would have induced to virtue.

It is more than idle for any to assert that a married woman to love any man save her partner, is not to be tolerated under any circumstances, for where she is ill-matched, there cannot be so notable a way to keep her to the proper duties of good wifehood, than to place her affections in so honourable a quarter, she must needs know that only by the most excellent behaviour can she be held in such esteem there as she desires—whereof the consequence must be, she will bear with the humours of a bad husband, and shew a cheerful endurance of her unhappy fate influenced by the gladdening hope of gaining what she most covets. Deprived of so comfortable a stimulus, the chances are the unhappy wife would sink into a miserable apathy, or, in disgust of her condition, would easily become the prey of any dishonest artifices that might be directed against her by a pretended lover. Mayhap some may say such ennobling love so produced is rarely to be found, but I place my faith too strongly on the honourableness of woman, to doubt it would be familiar enough, were men to be met with of sufficient worthiness to call it into more frequent existence. At least, such was the affection with which Mistress D'Avenant regarded the youthful Shakspeare, and the latter entertained it as of such a sort, and fully resolved it should so continue, if its lasting depended on his efforts to deserve it.

His thoughts very profitably employed, the young traveller pursued his journey. The waggon had gone too far to be overtaken by his walking, and though he was passed, or came up to divers carriers laden with packages of all kinds, his expenses had already so diminished his means, that he found himself unable to purchase a sitting in any of their carts, without leaving himself penniless ere his journey was finished. Indeed, as it was, by the time he reached Uxbridge, when he had paid his bill for lodging, he started in the morning with his purse emptied of the last coin. This was a discovery that would have come exceeding unpleasantly to many in a like situation with himself, for he was still a good distance from his destination, and nothing wherewith to get him bed or board when he there arrived; but with the eager hope of youth, he trudged along in high spirits, fully convinced he had but to shew himself to the elder Burbage, and his old acquaintance would welcome him with all proper heartiness.

As he was trudging manfully along, and had got within a mile or so of Tyburn, he came up to three men dressed with some appearance of respectability, who seemed to be comporting of themselves very merrily. The one was a stout fellow with a bold swaggering and an impudent daring look with him, his face pimpled, and his nose of a somewhat prominent redness about the top of it. He was attired in an old plum-coloured velvet doublet—stained down the front, as if with wine—his hose were scarlet, though the tint was fading through dirt and age; and his trunks had been of an orange tawney, but by this time they were nigher of a sad colour. He wore roses in his shoes, but they looked as though they had grown in a chimney, and his hat was of that sort that are distinguished by a high crown, but a spectator might look as high as the skies and yet see no crown of any kind. His companions were garmented in no better fashion—one of whom was a blear-eyed youth, with a famous large mouth, drawn on one side as though he had been in the habit of biting round a corner; and the other was chiefly noticeable, for a short, stiff, red beard, that stood out of his chin like a broken brick hanging over an old door-way. For all this, it was evident they carried the humour of lords with them.

"Ha, truly a good jest, Master Sugarsop,—a good jest, o' my life," cried the first, seeming to be in a famous mood for laughing.

"Bots on't!" exclaimed he with the wry mouth, "I see not the jest, Captain Sack, and if a jest it be I like not the humour on't, I promise you."

"By this hand, my Lord Cinnamon, I meant no offence in't!" exclaimed the owner of the red beard, with prodigious earnestness.

"I like not the humour on't—I like not the humour on't," muttered he who had been styled Lord Cinnamon, twisting his mouth in a manner as though he had a marvellous inclination to bite off the end of his left ear.

"I tell thee, 'tis a most exquisite jest," cried the one called Captain Sack, laughing out of all moderation. "What sayst, Master Countryman?"

The young traveller felt somewhat surprised at being appealed to in a matter of which he was entirely ignorant, but he could not help feeling amused at the droll figures of the persons before him.

"I prythee tell me the jest, and I will say what I think of it," replied he.

"'Tis no more than this," said the pimple-faced gentleman, as he very impudently stared the other in the face, whilst he cut the youth's purse from his girdle, and on the same instant, the other two stood on each side of him, with their daggers' points at his throat. He saw at a glance resistance was useless.

"'Ifaith, if that be all the jest, I see not much in it," observed William Shakspeare, who could not resist his natural tendency even at such a moment.

"Why, how now, and be hanged to thee!" exclaimed the disappointed thief, as he beheld the emptiness of the purse he had taken. "Dost put thy quips upon us? How darest to come abroad in such heathen fashion? 'Slight, 'tis a jest with a vengeance!"

"I see not the humour on't—I see not the humour on't!" cried his wrymouthed companion, seemingly as if he enjoyed his associate's dissatisfaction.

"Nor I either, Jemmy," answered the cut-purse; "but at least here is better jesting." And thereupon he snatched away from the youth his little bundle of linen. At this moment, a string of pack-horses becoming visible in the road, the three thieves made off as fast as they could down a bye lane, leaving the young traveller to continue his journey not only without money of any kind, as he was before, but without a single thing for his wearing, save what he had on his back.

CHAPTER XXX.

He was a very parfit gentel knight.
CHAUCER.

There pride dare not approach, nor discord spill
  The league 'twixt them, that loyal love hath bound,
But simple truth and mutual good-will,
  Seeks with sweet peace to salve each other's wound;
There faith doth fearless dwell in brazen towere
And spotless Pleasure builds her sacred bowre.
SPENSER.

Goe, little Booke! thyself present,
As child whose parent is unkent,
To him that is *the President*
Of Noblenesse and Chivalrie:
And if that envy bark at thee—
As sure it will—for succour flee
Under the shadow of his wing.
IBID.

METHINKS, it is now high time, the courteous reader should know something concerning of the two young knights, kinsmen to Sir Marmaduke de Largesse, who were left in so sore a strait some time since,—Sir Reginald being badly wounded by one whom he had so unjustly regarded as a false friend, and Sir Valentine seeming to be still more hurt he had done his companion in arms such damagement.

Little time was lost in conveying the latter to his kinsman's residence, where his loving cousin night and day attended on him better than could have done the faithfulest nurse that ever was known. The wounded knight could not be indifferent to such loving service, and when he was told the exact history of his behaviour to their mutual fair mistress, he loved him more than ever he had done, and on the instant, gave up all pretension to her in favour of his friend; but this the latter took no advantage of. He remembered the last words he had of the poor foundling, and the determination they evinced; and feeling also, that, could he succeed in getting her to change her mind, he could not with any satisfaction to himself enjoy the happiness whereof his friend was deprived, he resolved he would see her no more. As for her, it may be sufficient here to say, she was where she fancied herself free from her vile persecutors, yet was she much nigher to danger than she imagined.

Some time after this, the two friends joined their commander and tutor in chivalry, the noble Sir Philip Sidney, and accompanied him on his embassy, to condole with the French king, on the death of his dear brother, the Duke of Anjou. They made a most gallant figure at the court of France. Many fair ladies gave them excellent convincing proofs they were well esteemed of them, the which the elder received very readily, and lacked not a suitable return; for his disposition could accommodate itself to love—as he called it—as many as would allow of his passion; but the younger was not of this sort. He could give his affections to one only, and they were unalterably fixed on the gentle Mabel; and though he received the favours of the kind dames of France with the courtesy becoming a true knight, his heart was wandering through the groves of Charlcote after that exquisite, yet most unhappy creature, who had the sole claim to its sovereignty.

They were now strolling together in the garden of the Queen's palace at Whitehall, whilst Sir Philip was with her Majesty, and divers of the great lords and officers, holding of a privy council, to deliberate on certain important matters affecting the national honour and safety. Of this council, methinks some description would here be in good place. In a spacious chamber, richly hung with arras, the Queen's Highness sat in her robes of state—with a small crown of gold on her head—on a raised throne covered with rich carving and embroidery. One arm rested on the arm of the seat, with her jewelled hand imbedded in a fair white handkerchief, very fine and delicately worked; the other elbow rested on the other arm of the chair, her hand supporting her head, and her body resting against the back of the seat. In this position she remained with a famous gravity in her features, listening to what was advanced by each speaker; but she rarely remained in it long, for if anything dropped that she liked not, she would take the orator up with some tartness; and when the speech met with her views, she would add to it something of her own, which shewed how much it was to her satisfaction.

Before her in their robes of office sat the chief officers of the crown, save only the one who might be at that moment speaking, who stood up: and chiefest of these were the Lord Treasurer Burleigh, the Secretaries of State, Walsingham and Davison, the Earl of Leicester, the Earl of Sussex, Charles Howard of Effingham, the Lord High Admiral, Sir Nicholas Bacon, and Sir Philip Sydney. The subject under discussion related to the state of affairs in Flanders, and the necessity of there keeping a powerful force. It might be somewhat tedious to give the speeches of the different members of the council. Suffice it to say, as was usual the case when anything was to be done that required an outlay from the treasury, my Lord Treasurer strongly advised great caution, and argued, if peace could be procured, even at some sacrifice, 'twas infinitely better than the uncertainties of a war; and in his policy he was seconded by the two secretaries, and Sir Nicholas Bacon. My Lord of Leicester, on the other side, was for carrying on preparations in that country worthy of England's greatness; and spoke of the important results which would follow by so doing. My Lord of Sussex was for a like dealing, only he differed with the last speaker as to the manner it should be done, and that too with an honest bluntness, that spoke more of the soldier than the courtier. Whereupon the other replied, defending his views with much apparent calmness and courtesy, which brought a sharp rejoinder from my Lord of Sussex; and, as was often the case at the council, here would have followed a very angry disputation, had not her Highness quickly put an end to the dispute by rebuking them both. These two powerful noblemen rarely met without having some words; but my Lord of Leicester, by a famous command of temper, always made it appear he was in no way blameable; and my Lord of Sussex, who was usually rash enough to express what he thought, and manifestly thought no good of his opponent, was by many looked upon as the one in fault.

The other commanders there advocated the views of the Queen's favourite, save only Sir Philip Sydney, who had not yet expressed his opinions. At this her Highness, who held him in high esteem, commanded him to say what he thought would be best in the handling of such a business, upon which he gave a most eloquent and elaborate view of the present state of Europe, particularly dwelling on the hostile designs of the King of Spain upon this country, as evinced in the immense warlike preparations he was making in all parts of his dominions; and shewing in the clearest light what gain would accrue to England, by conducting her operations in Flanders with sufficient means and a proper spirit. It is utterly impossible to convey anything like unto an adequate idea of this notable speech; but it was put forward with amazing fineness of rhetorick, and with such excellence of language, that it was clear any who had the slightest comprehension of the matter, must be convinced of the properness of what Sir Philip had advanced.

Then Queen Elizabeth spoke at some length, expressing how naturally averse she was to any proceeding likely to give hurt to her good subjects; but as war was forced upon her for the protection of the kingdom from popish snares, and that to fight abroad was better for the people than to fight at home, it must needs be she could do no other than assist those who were combatting against her worst enemies, and so endeavour to keep the war from her own doors. Her speech was very spirited and full of sage quotations from Latin and other authors, to shew her justice somewhat—to shew her learning somewhat more. The end was, that she not only adopted the views of Sir Philip Sydney, but gave him the command of some forces that were to be sent into Flanders, to disembark at Flushing, of which place she appointed him governor. Other things were also to be done, but as these do not so much affect our story, methinks there shall be no need of the relation. After this the council broke up, and Sir Philip returned on horseback with the two young knights to his own dwelling.

Shortly after, the three companions in arms joined the Countess of Pembroke in the library, a fair chamber well stocked with all manner of books, especially of romances and poems both English and foreign. The countess seemed intent on a large manuscript; but this she put on one side at the entrance of her brother and his friends, whom she welcomed very gladly. Presently they fell to conversing, as was their wont, on such topics as were of the most intellectual character, for it was a custom with this truly famous woman to endeavour, as much as possible, to draw out the minds of her associates, and where she found them deficient, to shew them glimpses of the knowledge they wanted in its most delightful aspect, and give them a zest to acquire it more fully. This made her so much the admiration of the learned of her time. In truth I have some reason for thinking she diffused the spirit of intelligence more widely by the fascinations of her eloquence, than did one half the colleges in the kindgom with all their notable efforts at teaching. A familiarity with the best classic writers was then the fashion—perchance set by her highness, who was no contemptible scholar—and to this there was frequently joined considerable knowledge of the Italian poets and the French romances. But with the countess, and with her equally gifted brother, the fashion made itself apparent arrayed in those graces of humanity, which might make it most enchanting—and to them flocked such scholars as wished to be thought of the fashion, and those more fashionable sort of persons who sought to be regarded as scholars. The two young knights were among the very sincerest admirers of the Countess of Pembroke:—but Sir Valentine regarded her with an enthusiastic reverence, which exceeded even the feeling of the same kind with which he looked on Sir Philip Sydney, and few of their numerous circle of friends were so well esteemed of both these illustrious persons as were those gallant gentlemen.

"I have had notable rare company, brother, since the morning," said the countess.

"Truly, I cannot see how it could well be otherwise," answered Sir Reginald, with a very ready courtesy. "For even were you left alone, you must needs be in such excellent company as can no where else be met with."

"I'faith, Sir Reginald, methinks you are taking a leaf from the book of my kinsman Leicester," observed my Lady Pembroke, with an exquisite smile.

"Nay, I think he hath been taking a lesson from the courtly Sir Christopher Hatton," added her brother with a laugh.

"By this hand!" exclaimed the young knight earnestly. "The last lesson I took of any man was from a better master than either."

"And who might that be?" inquired Sir Philip. "For surely he must be exceeding worthy—my kinsman being a very noble gentleman, and Sir Christopher, though a very courtier, is not without some good qualities."

"I doubt not I could make a shrewd guess at this right famous master of yours?" said the countess, with an approving glance.

"I cannot imagine one who knoweth his excellence so thoroughly, could name any other," replied the knight.

"Let us have his title, and quickly, Sir Reginald," cried Sir Philip. "For my memory is at fault."

"Assuredly it is one Sir Philip Sydney, well known of all men to be the best master of knights that can be met with in this our age," replied Sir Reginald.

"And with all proper pride I do acknowledge myself also to have profited by his right admirable lessons," added Sir Valentine, with a warmer enthusiasm.

"Well, although, as I take it, you do over-rate the master hugely," replied the object of their eulogium, but not without a sensible satisfaction at its thorough honesty, "I must say this—I would every master were as honourably off for pupils. But who were of your company this morning, my dear sister?" inquired he, seeming anxious, as great minds ever are, by shifting of the conversation to avoid his own praises.

"Truly, I have had so many, I scarce can remember one half of them," replied his accomplished relative. "First there came the merry Bishop of Bath and Wells, to introduce to me a certain learned scholar of his acquaintance, who was exceeding anxious to be known to me, with whom I had much choice discourse, made more pleasant by some droll sayings of my Lord Bishop."

"Methinks Dr. Still is somewhat of too jesting a nature for a grave prelate," observed her brother good humouredly. "His 'Gammer Gurton's Needle,' smacketh very little of the church, and his talk hath just as much of the sermon."

"My next comer was a certain Master John Lily," continued the countess. "He hath brought me a play of his, entitled 'Alexander and Campespe,' which though I find to lack something in plot and character, is not without some fair signs of merit."

"Ah, Master Lily, I know him well," said Sir Philip. "He hath left the college for the playhouse, but I doubt his great fitness for either. He hath lately sought to set himself up as Master Grammarian, to teach us a new style of English, but surely nothing so strained and unnatural was ever heard of!"

"Then I had with me the famous author of Jeronimo," added his sister.

"Ay, Master Kyd hath got himself into marvellous repute," observed the other. "He hath a most moving skill in the composition of his plays. His blank verse is exceeding spirited, and not without a proper touch of true poetry—nevertheless, he possesseth many faults of extravagance, it would be advisable in him to eschew."

"After him I had the knight of the smirched mantle."

"Ha! my very excellent good friend Sir Walter Raleigh!" exclaimed Sir Philip, with much earnestness and some pleasantry. "By this light his throwing his fine cloak into the puddle, hath put his acquaintance on so fair a footing with her highness, he is like to make a gallant stand at court. But in justice I must acknowledge he is a truly valiant young soldier, and hath in him the best gifts of the scholar and the gentleman to an extent greater than that of any of whom I have knowledge."

"At least so he hath seemed to me," said the lady Pembroke, and then the two knights added their testimony of his worthiness, for he was of their particular approved friends—but more of this truly noble character anon gentle reader.

"After these there came persons of all kinds," continued the Countess of Pembroke. "I was like unto a besieged city sore pressed. Hither came gallants to idle their time—poets to read to me their verses—play writers to bespeak my presence at the play-house to see their play—booksellers to offer me the very newest works they had published, hoping for my commendation,—and many poor scholars seeking to be authors, who required only my poor influence, at least so they believed, as a stepping stone to fame. I did my best for all—and all appeared in excellent content with their visit."

After this the subject of their converse turned upon a certain work recently written by Sir Philip Sydney, since well known to every reader as the right famous Arcadia.

"Nay, dear brother, but the merit cannot be denied," exclaimed his fair relative, after the author had expressed a humble opinion of it. "I will not hear of your speaking of it slightly. It is a work just such as I should have expected from you—a combination of chivalry and scholarship put into the most delectable apparelling."

"You must needs be too partial a judge to pass an honest sentence in this case, sweet sister," said Sir Philip Sydney, good humouredly.

"That I can in no way allow," cried Sir Reginald. "That my Lady Pembroke is a good judge, and a fair judge, methinks would be stoutly maintained by every one who hath the honour of her acquaintance; not only because she is in herself peculiarly good and fair, but because her opinions partake so largely of the like qualities; and though she cannot help regarding the writer of so notable a work with considerable partiality, because of his standing in such near relationship to her, it doth not follow she cannot properly appreciate its excellences. Indeed I am apt to think she would look more closely into the nature of any production from such a source, and therefore know its quality and character better than could any other."

"Surely there can be no doubt of this," added Sir Valentine, more earnestly. "Even were my Lady Pembroke less gifted than she is, it is scarcely possible her love for the writer could mislead her in her judgment of the book; for as all that most perfect wit could do would be to praise, her affections are surely not like to stand in the way of so appropriate a duty. But surely, of all persons my lady ought to be the best qualified to be a judge in such case, else that nobleness of nature so many have found, can be but of small advantage to her."

"O' my word, you are all alike!" exclaimed Sir Philip, seeking to turn off the question as pleasantly as he could; then taking up a book which lay on the table before him, he added, "Want you now, a book deserving of your warmest encomium, here is one. It is no other than 'The Shepherd's Calendar,' written by my esteemed friend Master Edmund Spenser, who hath done me the honour of its dedication. It is a sort of rustic poem, or series of eclogues, wherein the poet, in the feigned name of Colin, expresseth very movingly his infinite griefs caused by the treachery of a false mistress, to whom he hath given the title of Rosalinde."

"I am apt to think this poem of Master Spenser's is not altogether a fiction," observed the countess. "There is a heartiness in it, a truth and vividness, which never come of the imagination alone."

"You are right," replied her brother, "I heard of Doctor Gabriel Harvey, to whom I am indebted for my introduction to the poet, that he had formed a deep attachment to some female, who, after seeking, by all manner of artifices, to ensnare his affections, when she found they were hers beyond recal, treated him with unexampled perfidy, and soon after married some obscure person—doubtless as worthless as herself. The general cry on hearing of such instances is, 'a good riddance:' and this may be true enough to a certain extent; but men of Master Spenser's stamp when they do love, do so entwine the filaments of their hearts with the beloved object, that any disunion is to them the terriblest laceration that can be imagined, and leaveth a wound which afflicteth them with a continual agony."

"Of all men living, such as are of the highest imaginations are most like to meet with such a fate," said his gifted sister. "None do so readily become the prey of an artful woman—for their love of the pure and beautiful, which is the powerfulest impulse of their natures, leadeth them to put their faith, and heart, and soul, in fair appearances; and when a woman, under such guise sheweth signs of being favourably disposed to them, they enrich her with their sweetest thoughts and sympathies, and look to her, and to her alone, for the realization of their happiness. I doubt not, as it generally happens in such a case, the original of Master Spenser's Rosalinde was an obscure person, who, assuming the qualities with which such a disposition as that of her gifted lover is most apt to be taken, was honoured with his regard; and then, merely out of selfish vanity to possess so proud a gallant, she made his confiding nature believe she truly loved him, till she had thoroughly enslaved his feelings, and forced his adoration to be subservient to advance sufficiently her own pride. I regret to say such women are by no means rare. They are of the thoroughly heartless, who recklessly enter into a mischief for which they can never render adequate compensation, careless of aught save the gratification of their vanity. 'Tis lamentable that such base idols should receive such precious sacrifice."

Both Sir Valentine and Sir Reginald, with their accustomed gallantry, were for asserting that women so treacherously disposed were not to be found; but the countess would not allow of statements so flattering. She honoured them for their opinion; but her own deeper knowledge of the subject, and honesty of heart, made her refuse it as erroneous.

"It matters not," observed her brother, interrupting the disputation. "There are spots on the sun, and if that we meet with similar blemishes in that wonderful fair luminary—woman, we ought to remember how many are her admirable qualities, and how hapless would be our case without her shining light to warm and illumine our world."

"I would grant all that very gladly," replied the countess; "and right proud am I to hear my sex so considered. But this altereth not the case; there are, unfortunately, women of the sort I have alluded to; and, be they few or many, the evil they do is out of any calculation; for they single out for their victims the truest and noblest natures; and the mischief endeth not with them, for the misery of such must needs affect the wide circle who take in them the interest they deserve. In the particular instance of Master Spenser, I feel more moved than perchance I otherwise might be, knowing, as I do, his good qualities so intimately. He is the gentlest creature I ever met, and a very child in simplicity and affectionateness—thoroughly ingenuous, unobtrusive, unoffending, kind, and grateful. Gifted, too, as he is, with the highest powers of mind, it seemeth a marvel to me he should be otherwise looked on by any woman save with admiration and homage."

"The worst feature in the case is the ingratitude of these false Rosalindes," added Sir Philip. "The poet honoureth such a woman by attiring her in the exquisite fair livery of his genius, to the complete hiding of her natural poor apparelling; and then thus admirably garmented, she quitteth him to whom she is so greatly indebted, and, by means of his gifts, palmeth her worthlessness upon some other."

"Now here is most excellent evidence of the noble qualities of our esteemed friend," said his sister, putting her hand upon the manuscript before her. "It is the first part of a great poem in heroical verse, wherein he intendeth to represent all the moral virtues, assigning to each a knight, in whose conduct the operations of that virtue, whereof he is the acknowledged protector, are to be expressed, and by whom the vices and unruly appetites, that are opposed to it, are to be overthrown. Truly, a most comprehensive design; but the surprising richness of the imagery—the purely imaginative character of the language—the high and chivalrous feeling which pervades every part—and the perfectly original character of each conception, as far as I have read of it—are equally manifest."

"Truly, 'The Fairy Queen' promiseth to be a work of lasting fame," added Sir Philip. "From the specimen entrusted to me, I hesitate not in saying, it cannot help proving to be a mine of the very richest ore."

"But what most deserveth our eulogium is the purifying and ennobling tendency of this poem," continued the countess. "The object appeareth to be to exalt humanity, and shew to what heights it can climb; that those who may be ambitious of greatness, shall have proper guidance to the elevation they aim at. With this idea in view, the poet bringeth before the reader, man in all his nobleness, and woman in all her purity—everything that can make knighthood appear in such chivalrous character, as must be most worthy of female adoration; and all that can give to feminine beauty that perfection, which is the truest excitement to knightly achievements."

"Surely, Master Spenser hath earned for himself the gratitude of every knight in Christendom!" exclaimed Sir Reginald.

"Ay, that has he," added Sir Valentine, with a like earnestness. "Indeed I know not how a great mind, such as his must needs be, could have found employment so profitable to virtuous feeling and honourable conduct." At this moment, the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of a serving man, announcing the name of Master Spenser, and presently there entered a man of handsome mild features, somewhat touched by the spirit of melancholy, but not sufficiently so to render their gravity unpleasing. His eyes were clear, and beaming with the gentlest expression; and his beard short, and rounded under the chin. He wore a suit of a sober cut, with a falling band round his neck, cut into points. In figure he was somewhat slim, and in behaviour of a graceful courtesy. All rose to welcome him at his approach, and though the greeting of the others was exceeding hearty, there was in that of the countess the tenderness of a sister. He received these tokens of their good-will with a modesty of demeanour, that bespoke the natural retiringness of his disposition.

The conversation soon returned to its former subject—the writings of Master Spenser. Sir Philip Sydney mingling with his praises some shew of criticism; but his gifted sister was evidently in no mood for playing of the critic, for she spoke most eloquently in their commendation. The poet listened with looks of delight and gratitude, attending to the opinions they expressed with the deepest respect, knowing what oracles his judges were, and seeming to marvel anything of his invention could be so well thought of.

"I am greatly bound to you for such honourable mention of my poor performance," observed he, with an impressive sincerity, "I have merely trod in the footsteps, and, as must needs be, at a humble distance of those illustrious masters of the epic art, Homer, Virgil, Ariosto, Dante, and Tasso; and I will strive all I may to continue in so glorious a path. But I am come here with the hope of seeing justice done to a poet, who, as far as I can judge of the example of his powers that hath accidentally fallen into my hands, is like to overtop the ablest writers of his age."

This speech created exceeding surprise in those around him, and the speaker was quickly asked to what he alluded; whereupon he continued—

"I have just parted with my gallant and noble-hearted true friend Sir Walter Raleigh, about an hour since, when, as I was passing by Dowgate, my attention was forcibly attracted by a decent looking young countryman, struggling in the rude grasp of divers constables, who were hurrying him off to prison, for what offence I know not. Whilst observing him, I noticed a paper fall from his doublet, which all else about him were too busy with their prisoner to regard; and I presently stepped forward and picked it up. I found it to be a poem, the which, with your gracious permission, I would gladly read to you."

Permission being very readily granted—for every one appeared singularly curious on so strange a matter—Master Spenser produced a paper, from which he read what is here set down:—

"THE POET OWNETH HIS SUBMISSION TO THE SOVEREIGN BEAUTY."

"Lo! from the feathery foam I see thee rise
'Scaped from the arms of th' enamoured billow,
A thousand balmy airs stoop from the skies,
And round about thee hold their pliant pillow;
The beach is graced—the oak, the elm, the willow,
With all their ancient heraldry appear,
Owning a brighter sunshine in thine eyes;
Streams laugh beneath thy looks; and far and near,
Doth the whole landscape thy rich livery wear.

"First-born of Nature! Queen of Life and Light;
Mother of Love! (whose power supports thy being)
Whose presence flames the quenchless lamps of night,
And flasheth where morn's burning car is fleeing,
Hither, to me! My fettered thoughts be freeing;
And, as the obedient slaves their mistress own
With thy divine apparel make them bright,
That men may see they're thine, and thine alone,
And where they go they may thy might make known.

"I call thee! I, thy fervent worshipper,
Whom thou hast gazed on from thy secret places,
Seeking to be thy holy minister;
Enclasp my spirit in thy fond embraces!
Delight each feeling with thy glad'ning graces!
Teach every sympathy thy gentle lore!
Be for my hopes a ready messenger;
And all that's best of me instruct to soar,
Where thou hast garnered thy most precious store.

"Ere I knew thee I was like some deep nook
O'ergrown with gnarled trunks and weeds entangled,
Where smiling nature never deigned to look,
And wind and water wrestled as they wrangled;
I met thy gaze;—Then all my verdure spangled

With countless myriads of refreshing dews;
The sullen flood turned to a sparkling brook,
And the hushed wind no more would shew his thews,
Where virgin buds betrayed their blushing hues.

" Then was I filled with store of sunny gleams,
As some rich pattern skilful hands are weaving,
All shot about in threads with golden beams;
Or ears of grain the harvest lord is sheaving,
Ere the great ripener his hot couch is leaving.
And such hath been the magic of thy glance,
A change fell o'er my thoughts, my hopes, my dreams,
And I became, through my allegiance,
A wilderness turned to a fair pleasaunce.

" I saw thee when thy mother Nature held
Thee in her lap before my marvelling glances,
When breeze and billow their rough music quelled
To soothing lullabies and cheerful dances,
When all earth's chivalry of blades and lances,
Leaped into motion over hill and dale,
And blooming youth and patriarchal eld
On bow'rs and banks, the rock, the wood, the vale,
Donned in thy name their brightest coat of mail!

" I knew thee by the soul-enthralling good
That threw its rosy halo round thy dwelling,
By banishment from thy pure neighbourhood
Of things that shew no token of excelling,
By tuneful praises, ev'ry voice was telling,
Of plumed courtiers grateful for thy smile;
And the sweet incense, not to be withstood,
Shed by a thousand censers, all that while
Swung to and fro beneath each forest aisle.

" I loved thee for the kind and open hand
Thou hast at all times held out at my greeting,
For lessons of the true, the rare, the grand,
That made my entertainment at our meeting;
For bounteous largess, evermore repeating,
Of precious favours delicately choice;
And more than all for sky, and sea, and land,
Which, in thy braveries, thou madest rejoice
With graceful form and music-breathing voice.

" Seen, known, and loved of me so long and well,
Methinks I hold such fond familiar footing,
That shouldst thou slumber in some moss-grown cell,
Or ruin hoar where reverend owls are hooting,
Whilst Time its strong foundations is uprooting,
Unto thy privy chamber I might hie,
On tiptoe, breathless, lest I break the spell
Which holds thine eyelids with so firm a tie,
And couched beside thee lovingly might lie.

" Therefore I call thee now, sweet lady, mine,
Come forth, my queen, from thy most glorious palace!
Dear Priestess, leave thy star-enamelled shrine
That boasts its river font, and floral chalice,
To the storm's rage or cloud's most gloomy malice,

And in my mind make thou thy present bower;
Shed there thy warmest, brightest, purest shine,
And as 'tis nurtured by thy genial power,
Each fresh idea shall shew a rarer flower.

" As 'tis of thee that I essay to sing,
On me let thy immortal worth be grafted,
My nature then thy precious fruit would bring
Like odours on the summer zephyrs wafted;
Or some rude weapon gemmed and golden-hafted,
To be a sign unto an after age,
That I had been thy knight, thy lord, thy king,
Thy scholar by thy teaching rendered sage,
Thy slave, whose labour brought a goodly wage.

" Ah me! perchance thou art not so inclined,
And think'st it better to be gaily straying,
Giving thy tresses to the wanton wind
As thou dost wander up and down a maying;
Or art by clearest waters idly straying,
Lost in delight of thine own loveliness,
Mirrored within the wave—and there dost bind
A delicate garland o'er each dainty tress,
And all thy charms dost tire in such brave dress.

" Well, if 'tis so indeed—it needs must be,
I cannot give thee any such adorning,
Still shall all natural things witness for me
In courts where there hath never been suborning,
That noon and twilight, eve and early morning,
Only to gain thy love I cared to live;
But surely if 'tis vain to hope for thee,
Thou canst thy highest power and purpose give
To some befitting representative?

" And such a one know I, whose great desert
Giveth her comeliness its noblest garnish;
Her spirit, that makes envy fall inert,
Gleams like a blade that knows no soil or tarnish,
Or painting shining in its freshest varnish;
Oh ne'er hath been such costly carcanet!—
A truth that none who live can controvert,
For in and out all stirling gifts are met,
And every gem of price therein is set.

" Doubtless so rare a being hath obtained
From thee the title of her rarity:
For from what other source could she have gained
Her embassy of love and charity?
'Twixt ye there is such small disparity,
I oft have thought she was herself the queen,
Thou her,—and near her have remained,
Paying that rev'rence to her shape and mein
I would but give to thee hadst thou there been.

" And long may she such glorious office hold!
And long to me present her fair credentials!
May in each word her embassy be told,
Each look convey the same divine essentials,
And every writing teem of such potentials

Thy mightiness alone hath meaning for:
Then with a tribute richer far than gold
Will I do homage as thy servitor
And ever honour thy ambassador.

"Truly, I'll find her lodging of the best,
All furnished in a fashion most endearing,
To be its mistress rather than its guest;
And give such gallant vestment for her wearing,
As shall the best become her noble bearing;
I'll have before her Fame's loud trumpet sound;
Upon her head I'll place a jewelled crest:
And wheresoe'er her footsteps shall be found,
My monuments shall glorify the ground.

"And thus my whole affections I subject,
While o'er my cheek the hue of life is florid,
To use thy laws, thy rule, thy dialect,
Forswear all brutal hate and vengeance horrid,
From zone to zone—the frigid and the torrid—
Whilst of this world I am a denizen;
And ever shew the loyallest respect
Where'er thy signet is apparent, when
Thou seekest dealings with my fellow men."

A famous marvelling was exhibited by all present, at the reading of these verses, and much was said of the unknown author, for whom exceeding interest had been excited; and, at last, Sir Philip Sydney hurried Master Spenser away with him, that they might learn who he was, and where he might be found, with as little delay as possible.

CHAPTER XXXI.

This fool comes from the citizens,
Nay, prythee do not frown!
I know him as well as you
By his livery gown—
Of a rare horn-mad family.
Anon.

Natta. Fortune averts her fate.
Flamen. Avert, you gods,
The prodigy. Still—still some pious rite
We have neglected. Yet, Heaven be appeased,
And be all tokens false and void, that speak
Thy present wrath!
Ben Jonson.

Tell Fortune of her blindness,
Tell Nature of decay,
Tell Friendship of unkindness
Tell Justice of delay:
And if they dare reply,
Then give them both the lie.
Sir Walter Raleigh.

By dint of constant inquiries of carmen, pedlars and others, the youthful Shakspeare found his way to the Bankside, where, as he had heard, stood the playhouse whereof the elder Burbage was manager. He entered London by the Uxbridge road, in a strange wonder at the number of persons he met, as soon as he had got to the field called the Haymarket, near Charing, where the country people held a market of hay and straw, for the convenience of the Londoners. There, the abundance of splendid mansions he passed, and numberless houses of the citizens, the shops, the warehouses, the churches, the great din of traffic, that sounded along the streets, of itinerant chapmen bawling their wares—with the rolling of carts and waggons, and the goodly cavalcade of nobles and gallants riding their sprightly palfreys, astonished him exceedingly, whilst the more closely he approached the city, the path became more thronged with persons of all kinds and conditions, in such exceeding variety of appearance, that it seemed an endless puzzle to the young traveller to guess their several characters and vocations.

By the time he arrived at the Globe playhouse, he was weary with hunger and walking. A flag was flying at the roof, which denoted that the play had commenced, as he learned from a bystander; so he thought it would be most advisable to wait till it was over, before he presented himself to any of his old companions; therefore he strolled about the place amongst the venders of fruit, and crowds of idlers that stood nigh the building. As he was noting, with his accustomed curiousness, the manners of the sort of persons in his neighbourhood, on a sudden a horseman rode up, and alighting beside him, cried, "Here, fellow, hold my horse, and I'll give thee a groat at my return," flung him the bridle, and quickly vanished into the playhouse. William Shakspeare was taken somewhat by surprise at this occurrence, but remembering that his purse was penniless, and himself both tired and hungry, he was well enough disposed for the earning of any sum, even though it came of such humble employment as the holding of a horse: nevertheless, whilst he walked the animal up and down, his mind was wonderfully busy in forming all sorts of bright ambitious prospects, as completely at variance with his present poor shift, as any matter could be.

Thus he employed himself, till the people coming thronging out of the doors of the playhouse, told him that the play was done; and presently, up comes the gallant, whose horse he had in charge, gave him the promised groat, and rode away; but it so happened, while he was engaged with the latter, two young men, very fairly clad, who were passing near, when they caught sight of the young Shakspeare stopped of a sudden, and regarded him with a very curious and marvelling aspect.

"It must be him, Dick!" said one.

"Ay, marry, it is; but what bringeth him here, holding of horses, Tom?" added the other. The object of their attention, as soon as he had parted with the gallant, was for proceeding to the Globe, but he was stopped by these two persons making up to him, whom he had no great difficulty in recognising as his old schoolfellows, Tom Greene and Dick Burbage. Great was the joy of this meeting on both sides; and the young traveller soon told what brought him to London, and his adventures on the journey, even to the holding of the horse, which was received by his merry companions with some interest and more laughing. The latter seemed to be just the same careless, free-hearted fellows they had been when boys; and, I doubt not, were quite as ready to pass off an ingenious jest here in London, as ever they had been in merry Stratford.

"Where's thy father, Dick?" inquired Greene.

"Methinks, he must now be intent upon the getting rid of his blackamoor's face," replied young Burbage.

"Come thou with us, Will," said the former to the youthful Shakspeare. "We will to Master Manager at once, and get him to give thee a place in our company—amongst whom thou wilt meet Hemings and Condell, thy once chosen associates—then, leave the rest to us, and if we lead thee not a right merry life, it cannot be other than thine own fault." Talking of their old pranks, in a famous humour at every allusion to them, the three proceeded together into the playhouse, and after passing through some strange places—as the young traveller took them to be,—they arrived at a door;—William Shakspeare in famous spirits and full of pleasant anticipation, for all his hunger and weariness.

"What, ho, Master Manager!" cried Tom Greene, knocking loudly; "Give us entrance, I prythee! I bring thee aid—I bring thee strength—I bring thee comfort—I bring thee a marvel, a prodigy, a phœnix,—I bring thee present profit and future greatness."

"Come in, a God's name, Tom!" replied a voice from within, with prodigious earnestness. The young traveller had some difficulty in recognising his old acquaintance, in the smut-faced personage half unclad that was pulling off his hose, in the meanly furnished chamber, in which the former now found himself.

"Heart o' me!" exclaimed Greene, laughingly, as the manager, at the entrance of a stranger began hastily a drawing on his hose again, "Care not for thy legs; methinks they are well enough for a black fellow."

"Well enough!" echoed the manager, glancing at his limbs with a very manifest pride. "Well enough, for a black fellow, saidst thou? I tell thee what it is, Tom, black fellow or white fellow, or even a Greene fellow, for the matter of that, hath never been able to boast of such handsome things to stand on since the world began."

"Bravely said, Legs!" replied the other in the same merry humour. "But here, I have brought with me a certain friend of mine, whose great merit I can vouch for, who desireth to be a player, and of our company."

"'Tis Will Shakspeare, father, from Stratford," added his son.

"Away with him!" angrily cried the elder Burbage, to the extreme astonishment of every one else. "'Slight, I've had enough of Will Shakspeare to last me the rest of my days."

"Why, what hast had of him, I wonder!" exclaimed Greene.

"Had, quotha!" replied the manager; "I've had of him what was like to get me a speedy hanging on the highest tree. Some six years since or more, I met him, when with my company about to play at a noble lady's mansion in the country, and he got me to consent to his playing of a part in a new play that I had sent me to represent before her visitors—well, the varlet was not content with marring the ending on't by saying of a parcel of stuff, instead of what had been put down for him; but scarce an hour after he mends the matter by assisting of a companion to run off with a young damsel there on a visit. It was well for me I shewed my prudence by affecting a perfect ignorance of the whole proceedings, for had it come to my lord's ears I had shared in them in any way, I should have been ruined outright, clapped in a prison, and ordered for execution without hope of reprieve."

William Shakspeare explained the circumstance just alluded to, but the more he explained the more enraged seemed the manager, that he should have been put in such jeopardy as he had been to assist in a scheme of which he was kept in entire ignorance, and not even the entreaties of Greene and his own son could induce him to alter his resolution to have none of Will Shakspeare for to be of his company. Dick Burbage got vexed at this, as was evident by his look, but Greene confined not his vexedness to looks. He spoke out warmly in behalf of his friend, and said such sharp words to the elder Burbage that he grew choleric, and there would have been a complete falling out betwixt them, had not the cause of it interposed, and implored them not to make him an occasion for quarelling. The young traveller left the chamber with a much heavier heart than he had entered it. Here were all his proud hopes overthrown at a blow, and he, faint with hunger and his long journey, without a place to lay his head in, or aught for his many necessities but the solitary groat he had received from the gallant for holding of his horse. He had only got a few steps from the playhouse when he was overtaken by Tom Greene.

"Care not for that old churl;" said he, "perchance thou wilt do as well elsewhere: so keep up thy heart, Will; and Dick and I will devise something for thy advantage. I have now an appointment which will take me an hour or so, in the mean while speed thee over London Bridge, and inquire thy way to the house of Mistress Colewort, who selleth simples, and herbs, and such things, at the sign of the Phœnix, in Bucklersbury—there is my lodging; call for what thou wilt, and make thyself at home there, till I come." The kind-hearted player hurried away, and his old schoolfellow, full of grateful feelings, retraced his steps the way he had come. He remembered Bucklersbury, having passed it going from Cheap to Lombard-Street, therefore he never thought of questioning any as to his road, but proceeded on, thinking over his heavy disappointment so intently, he regarded nothing else. He had passed London Bridge, and not being very heedful, had taken a wrong turning out of Fish-Street Hill. He had got some distance along sundry winding narrow streets, when, all at once, he was brought to a stand still by some authoritative voice, and he quickly found himself surrounded by persons in long gowns trimmed with fur, that seemed some officers of the corporation, and others who, by their bills and apparelling, he took to be constables of the watch.

"Stand, fellow, and give an account of yourself!" exclaimed one.

"What brought thee here? Whose varlet art thou!" inquired another.

"An' he be not a masterless man, Master Fleetwood, I know not one when I see him," observed a third.

"A very vagrom, I'll swear," cried an ancient constable, poking his grey beard into the young traveller's face. "I pray you, Master Recorder, to question him of his calling. I am in huge suspicion I have had him in my custody some score of times already."

"What is thy name, caitiff?" demanded he who was styled Master Fleetwood, in a very high and mighty sort of manner.

"First tell me, why I am thus rudely questioned and stopped, my masters?" said the youthful Shakspeare, who liked not being so handled.

"Oh, the villain!" exclaimed one of the constables, in a seeming amazement. "Here is monstrous behaving to his worship master recorder, and so many honourable aldermen! Dost know no manners? Wilt shew no respect of persons? Here are divers of the worshipful corporation going about taking up all manner of masterless men and houseless vagroms that infest the city; and if thou art not one of them, thou art a most graceless fellow. Tell master recorder thy name on the instant, or thou shalt to Newgate in a presently."

"You have no business with me, or my name either," answered their prisoner, getting to be a little chafed at his treatment.

"Who is thy master, caitiff?" inquired one of the aldermen.

"I have none," replied the youth, somewhat proudly.

"There, he confesses it, an' it please your worship," cried the constable. "I could have sworn he was a masterless man, he hath such a horrible vagrom look."

"To prison with him!" exclaimed Master Fleetwood, with some asperity. "This country gear of thine, I doubt not, is only worn as a blind. Thou hast a very dishonest visage; an exceeding cutpurse sort of countenance: and I feel assured, that when thou art hanged the[illegible]ill be at least one rogue the less."

"And I feel assured," said William Shakspeare, "that when thou departest this life,—no matter in what fashion—there will be at least one fool the less."

"Away with him, for a rude rascal!" cried the enraged recorder. The aldermen made similar exclamations, and five or six of the watch so held and hustled him, that for all his struggles, which were very great, he was presently dragged, like a felon, through the public streets, with no lack of abuse and blows, till he was safely lodged in the prison of Newgate. Here he scarcely had opportunity for the noticing of anything till he found himself in a large yard, surrounded by amazing high walls, wherein were several prisoners of different ages, most of whom looked to be necessitous poor fellows, who had most probably been driven into dishonest courses by the pressure of some fierce want; but there were others whom, at a glance, it was easy to see were downright villains—and some few whose appearance bespoke their only crime to have been their want of friends.

Some were amusing themselves at football, others at bowls—some at cards, others at dice; and these were generally of the villanous sort. Here and there might be seen one walking about in a very woeful countenance, who joined in none of the sports; and these were of the friendless. As soon as he had entered the place, the young player was surrounded by several of his fellow-prisoners—some curious, some abusive, and all apparently thieves outright, for they presently snatched from him whatever they could lay a hand on, that had been spared in the examination of the constables and turnkeys; and this they did with such thorough artifice, he could not see by whom it was done. However, when they discovered he had nothing more they could readily deprive him of, or saw better entertainment elsewhere, they left him to his own reflections, which, it may well be believed, were none of the comfortablest.

Tired of the noise and ribaldry of his companions—their fierce oaths and coarse vulgar manners, the young traveller took to observing those who kept aloof. Some of these appeared to be of a much higher rank than the others; and with one he soon made acquaintance; for it was impossible for any well disposed person to behold the countenance of William Shakspeare and not feel inclined to be on friendly terms with him; and from this person he quickly learned the names and characters of most of his fellow-prisoners, and in return was told how he came to be among them.

"Ah, worthy sir," said the stranger. "You have been placed here by the same meddlesome person as hath imprisoned me—to wit, Master Recorder Fleetwood, who seeketh by over-busyness, to pass with her highness's sage counsellors, for a famous loyal and notable zealous officer. I have been thrust here merely because he chose to suspect me of the high crime of being of the Catholic faith, and of attending to the rites and solemnities of such religion; and for no greater offence than this, divers worthy gentlemen have been by him as ignominiously treated. Some sent to one prison—some to another; and all punished with heavy fines and grievous imprisonment."

"I marvel such outrage upon justice should be allowed," observed the youth warmly.

"I grieve to say such things are grown too common to make marvels of," replied his companion. "Perchance, the queen and her chief ministers are not disposed to countenance such pestilent tyranny; indeed, I question they ever hear of it in any way like the truth; but such is the unhappy state of things in the city, in consequence of the meddlesomeness of this same tyrannical recorder, that for a man to dare attend the service of the religion he conscientiously believeth to be the true one, he shall be accounted the worst of villains; and for one that cometh to any poverty and hath not a friend in the world, he is forthwith thrust into prison, to consort with felons and the vilest of characters. All this while, almost under the very noses of these zealous officers, are to be found houses where cut-purses may be met with by scores, teaching their art to young boys, and enjoying of their ill-got booty in every manner of drunkenness and riotous infamy, and they are left undisturbed to do as they list."

"And how long think you, worthy sir, us poor victims of such intolerable wrong shall be kept in this horrid place?" inquired the other.

"Truly, there is no knowing," answered his fellow prisoner. "If you have a friend at court who will take up your cause, 'tis like enough you will soon get your liberty; but if you are not so provided, there is no saying of what length may be your imprisonment."

This was but sorry consolation for the young traveller, and it left him nothing but an endless prospect of bolts and bars, and stone walls. The time came for the prisoners to be locked up for the night in separate cells, and a sullen fellow of a turnkey conducted William Shakspeare to a most dismal-looking narrow dungeon, furnished with nothing save a little straw, a jug of water, and a loaf of bread. Long as had been his fast, he felt no desire to break it; but the bed was welcome, and he flung himself on it with a heart overburthened with most unhappy feelings. A famous ending had his glorious anticipations come to! The visions of greatness that could awhile since scarce be spanned, save by imagination, were now cribbed within a cold narrow cell. All his fine hopes that a few days before looked to be heir apparent to the brightest honours of genius, now must needs put up with straw for lying, bread and water for victual, and bare stone walls for lodging. To say he was not cast down at such ill fortune, were to depart from the truth strangely, for in very honesty he was in a desperate sadness—as will be found all very sanguine natures when they come to find their high expectations overthrown; and assuredly he had some reason, for when he should have his liberty was most uncertain, and to a free aspiring mind like his, confinement in such narrow limits was hardly to be endured.

But it soon struck him that despondency would do him but small service, and the only way to get off the unpleasantness of his present strait, was to bear it patiently. He lay a thinking what he should do. He cared not how soon he got away from his present companions—for he had already had enough of them, and determined as the first thing to let his old schoolfellow Tom Greene know where he had been placed, that if by his means his liberation could be effected, it might be done with all convenient speed. In this he overlooked the difficulty there was of his getting any communication conveyed from Newgate. Had he any sufficient bribe, there would be some chance of it, but in his penniless state, he was like enough to remain where he was till doomsday, ere his friend could know of his hapless case, through the assistance of his jailors. Fortunately of this he was ignorant, for he presently fell to more agreeable thoughts, and as he was in fancy fondling his dear children—weary with trouble and exhausted by fatigue, he fell into a deep sleep.

Here in this noisome dungeon he was again visited by the glorious dreams of his early days. The place became a most fair landscape, beautifully garnished with ravishing sweet blossoms, and the whole neighbourhood filled with a fairy company as choicely apparelled, as beautifully featured, singing as delectably and dancing with as delicate a grace as ever; and, as usual, brighter than them all shone her who seemed their queen, and she regarded him with a very marvellous kindness, led the others to do him all imaginable gentle courtesies, and in music of exquisite pleasantness sung him such comfortable words as appeared to fill him with greater hope than he had known his whole life long. But besides this, she addressed him with language of counsel, to the effect he would keep his nature unsullied by evil doings; pointing out the profit of honourable behaviour, and assuring him of the notable truth, that he who seeks for fame, never can hold it for any time, save with pure hands and a noble heart.

Then she bade him look in a certain direction, and there he beheld the figure of himself, done to the very life, seeming to be hungry, weary, and a prisoner as he was—anon the scene changed; he had his liberty, but he was struggling with manifold hardships, one following on another so closely there was no rest for them, and each pressing with such exceeding severity it seemed a marvel how they could be tolerated; they lasted a long space, but gradually appearances looked more favourable; the prospect became brighter, the scenes changed rapidly from one delightful landscape to another, till it appeared as though a whole world of splendour and happiness lay open to his view. From one quarter the applause of assembled thousands were shouted in his ears; from another came the commendations of whole multitudes of the learned; here, in some humble hearth-side, resounded the honest praises of the poor and lowly; and elsewhere from the hall, the bower, the garden, and the grove, plaudits as fervent were breathed from gallant knights and honourable fair ladies. Certes, he would have been glad enough to have dreamt such a dream as this all his days; but a rough voice and a rude shake put it to a sudden ending, and starting up he found one of the turnkeys standing over him with a lanthorn, his ill-featured countenance forming a most revolting contrast to the sunny faces he had gazed on in his vision.

"A murrain on thee, wilt thou never wake?" exclaimed the jailor sharply. "Why, thou sleepest as though thou hadst no hope of sleep again. Marry, an, thou takest such rest the morning thou art to be hanged, they must needs put thee to the rope in the midst of it."

"What want you with me?" inquired the prisoner.

"Thou must along with me with all speed," replied the man.

"For what purpose, I pray you?" asked the youth.

"Purpose, quotha, how should I know?" said the jailor. "Mayhap 'tis the pillory—mayhap the stocks—mayhap a goodly whipping: they be the only purposes that travel to Newgate, I'll warrant. But come along, I tell thee, I can allow of no tarrying."

Believing it useless to say anything more, William Shakspeare rose and followed his guide through numberless narrow passages, so dark he could scarce see his way along, even with the help of the lanthorn his companion carried before him, the jailor grumbling at every step, and his prisoner in a mood hardly more social, from having been disturbed in such pleasant dreaming. From all he could gather from the sulky turnkey, his being led to another part of the prison boded him no good; and he supposed it was to receive some degrading punishment or another, such as is commonly bestowed on persons whose chief crime happeneth to be their poverty.

In such manner the two arrived at a door in a distant part of the building, which the jailor opening, bade the other enter by himself. On gaining admission into the chamber, the latter found three persons seated together, whom he took to be his judges going to sentence him to the dreaded punishment. One was a very severe looking personage, from whose aspect he could gather but few hopes, who was clad somewhat in jailor fashion, with sundry large keys at his belt. The others had much of the gallant in their appearance, and possessed countenances that savoured considerably more of humanity.

"An' it please you to leave his examination to me, I will have the truth from him speedily," said the first to his companions; and then turning sharply to the young prisoner, commenced questioning him after the following fashion, the other answering as follows:—

"Fellow! what's thy name?"

"William Shakspeare."

"Where dost come from?"

"Stratford on Avon, in Warwickshire."

"How long hast been in London?"

"Only a few hours."

"What brought thee here?"

"I came to be a player in the company of Master Burbage at the Bankside."

"Now, Master Turnkey, this evidently proves him to be no vagrant," observed one of the gallants.

"I pray your worship stop awhile," replied the jailor. "These fellows have some famous fine story always at their commandment. O' my life, I do believe, were you to examine the most notorious rogue under my hands, he would presently make himself out to be as honest a man as any in the city. Let me ask of him a few more questions." Then turning to his prisoner, he added—"How long hast been a player?"

"I cannot say I have ever been a player," answered the other.

"There, I said I would presently make him shew himself for what he truly is—a masterless man, and no player!" exclaimed the turnkey, exultingly, to his companions, and then turning sharply to the prisoner, added—"Prythee have done with thy coney-catching; I am not to be so caught, my young master. Thou saidst but a moment since thou wert a player, and now thou hast the impudency to declare thou hast never been a player. What dost mean by that, fellow?"

"I mean just what I said," replied William Shakspeare, undauntedly; "I have many times played in plays; but as I have done it solely for mine own amusement, I could not consider myself a player, who playeth only for his own living."

"Truly, a just distinction," said one of the gallants.

"A monstrous fine story, I'll warrant," exclaimed the turnkey. "But if there be any truth in what thou hast advanced, perchance thou wilt name some person of repute who will testify to thy honesty."

"Very readily," replied the prisoner; "Thomas Greene, a player at the Globe, who hath his lodging at the sign of the Phœnix, in Bucklersbury, where I was proceeding when I was taken hold of by the constables and conveyed here; he will vouch for me at any time, for he hath been my school-fellow; as have the younger Burbage, Hemings, and Condell, other players at the Globe."

"Marry, players must make but sorry vouchers, for, methinks, they be little better than vagroms," observed the jailor.

"The persons named I know to be of a very fair character," replied the gallant who had before spoken. "William Shakspeare, allow me to ask you one question?"

"Any number, if it please you, sir," answered the prisoner, charmed with the courteous manner of his interrogator.

"Have you lost anything since your arrival in London?"

"I have lost all I had," replied the other. "The constables deprived me of what they could lay their hands on, and the prisoners here in Newgate took from me what was left. I should have cared the less, if they had spared me certain writings I had about me."

"What sort of writings were they?"

"Verses chiefly."

"Were they your own composition?"

"They were."

"Is this one of them?" inquired his questioner, placing a paper in his hand.

"Indeed it is, and the one I last wrote of them all," replied the young poet, glancing at his own lines, as if glad to have them back.

"I am convinced of it," added the other. "It was picked up by my companion, Master Edmund Spenser, on the spot where you had been struggling with the constables."

"I deem myself wondrous fortunate in having been there at such a time," said Master Spenser, warmly. "And having read its worthy contents, I hurried to my noble and esteemed good friend here, Sir Philip Sidney, and succeeded, as I expected, knowing his truly generous disposition, in interesting him to seek you out, and deliver you from your undeserved imprisonment."

William Shakspeare was surprised and delighted beyond measure, at hearing of names he had for some time looked up to as the most honourable in the kingdom, and expressed himself very gratefully for the trouble they had been at on his account. But the matter rested not here. He presently walked out of Newgate, with his two famous new acquaintances, without hindrance from the jailor, for they had brought with them the Earl of Leicester's authority for his liberation, which none dared gainsay; and shortly after, to the infinite satisfaction of all parties, he found himself seated by the side of his early patrons, Sir Valentine and Sir Reginald, at the house of Sir Philip Sydney, by whom he was very kindly and liberally entertained.

CHAPTER XXXII.

To you I have unclasped my burthened soul,
Emptied the storehouse of my thoughts and heart,
Made myself poor of secrets; have not left
Another word untold which hath not spoke
All that I ever durst, or think, or know.

FORD.

Therefor a woman ought not in no wyse to refuse to come at the commandement of her lord, yf she wyl have and kepe his love and pees. And also by good reason humylyte ought to come fyrste to the woman, for ever she ought to shewe herself meke and humble toward her lord.

Boke of the enseygnements and teching that the Knight of the Tower made to his Daughters.

Give me a key for this,
And instantly unlock my fortunes here.

SHAKSPEARE.

"Boy! can I trust thee?"

"Ay, my lord, with your heart's deepest secret; and the grave itself shall not be more silent than your poor page."

"I do believe thee. I have tried thee long, and found thee the faithfulest honest creature master ever knew. That thou lovest me I am assured. I have had good proof on't. I thought there was not one heart in which I could meet the slightest sympathy, but in thee there are signs of such abundance as make me amends for the unfeelingness of others. My spirit is weary of long-suffering. My health is broken. I cannot disguise from myself I am sinking fast. It therefore becometh necessary I should procure some one to perform for me those offices I shall soon be disabled from attempting. To do this I must betray a secret I have kept as jealously as if my whole life depended on its preservation; and in none can I put faith, save only thee. Thou canst serve me if thou wilt, as page never served his lord before; but if the duty should be distasteful to thee, as 'tis very like to be, I hold thee free to refuse; and if, after what I am about to tell thee, thou canst look on me no more as one worthy to be thy master, I will honourably provide thee with all things necessary for thy living elsewhere."

"My lord, I am in heart and soul a creature of your own; and whatever service I can render necessary for your safety, depend on it, it shall be done faithfully and well, according to my poor ability."

This conversation took place between the Lord de la Pole and his page, after one of the fearfullest of those fearful fits to which the unhappy Earl was generally subject, when he was left in the mourning chamber. It was evident, as he had said, that his health was fast declining, for his right noble countenance looked more haggard than it was wont; and his dark lustrous eyes appeared to be rapidly losing the fire which had so brightly lighted them His raven hair too had been thinned of its luxuriance, and all about him bespoke that breaking up of the constitution, with which long-continued grief marks its victim for the grave. His youthful companion wore a similar melancholy, doubtless caused from constant observation of his lord's sufferings, and this gave a very touching expression to his handsome boyish features, which increased greatly whenever he chanced to turn his gaze upon the Earl. The latter, still in his mourning suit, sate in the library before mentioned; and Bertram, in vestments of the same colour, seated himself by his lord's command at a short distance, where he remained in an attitude of the profoundest attention, and with an expression of the most intense interest, whilst the Earl proceeded with the promised narration.

"Of my family, methinks I need say nothing," commenced he; "the greatness of the Suffolks, of which I am a branch, must be sufficiently known, but the fame of their power and nobleness so influenced my early life, I could not rest till I had done something worthy of the name I bore. My youth was spent in foreign wars, under the most famous leaders; and whenever I heard of any one celebrated for deeds of arms, I sought all ways to surpass him; nor would I be satisfied till my pre-eminence was acknowledged. But this was by no means the whole of what I did. I had been well instructed; and perchance, I may add, I was ever of a well-disposed nature, whereof the consequence was, I took especial heed my conduct elsewhere should be of a piece with my achievements in the field. Honour was my idol—honour I worshipped: in no case could I be prevailed on to meddle in any matter wherein honour was not clearly conspicuous to all men's eyes; and to the same extent that I strove carefully to attain every title honour could bestow, I was jealous that my right to it should have no questioning. None could be more desirous of good opinion. To hear myself well spoke of, was an infinite pleasure; but to have any one's ill word, to be ridiculed, slandered, or misused in speech, fretted me beyond measure. Mayhap this was a weakness; but whatever it was, it kept unslacked in me the impulse to exert myself to gain a lasting reputation, till the name of De la Pole stood, as I proudly believed, second to none in every commendable quality.

"I pass over my labours, to build me up this goodly reputation; suffice it to say, I returned to my native land in the full vigour of manhood, and at the court of her Highness Elizabeth was speedily recognised, as what I had sought so earnestly to be. Hitherto I had thought nothing of love; my career of honour left me no time for tender dalliance, or else I was indifferent to the charms of such fair creatures as I had seen; but amongst the queen's ladies there was one, whose youth, beauty, character, and station, united to form, as I then thought, the noblest damsel in the realm. In her, fame had left no one part which envy might assail; and fortune had surrounded her with such prodigality of gifts, as if to show how delighted she was in having so worthy an object on whom to bestow them. Methinks 'tis almost needless to say she had suitors. She had broad lands; she was of one of the powerfulest families in the kingdom;

and she appeared as peerless in conduct as she was in person; and such attractions could not fail of bringing to her feet a sufficiency of wooers. I had heard much in her praise before I beheld her; but ere I had had an hour's acquaintance, I doubted she had been done justice to. Still I kept aloof from the crowd by whom she was always surrounded, and satisfied myself with observing her at a distance. Every day I saw her she seemed to grow more admirable; and each relation I heard of her exceeded the preceding one, towards proving her wondrous well-disposedness.

"A message from herself brought me at last to her side—a message so expressive of compliment, I attended her summons with more pleasure than ever I had known from similar commendations, gratifying as they had always been to me. Once there, it appeared as though I must there stay. At first she would scarce allow me to be anywhere else; but in a fair interval, I found myself under so strong a charm, nowhere else would I remain could I avoid it: in brief, I loved her. Some months afterwards, I gained from her, that long before she had seen me, she had loved me for my reputation. After a delicious sufficiency of most exquisite courtship, my happiness seemed to be complete, when I received her in marriage. In a little while, I believed my real felicity had only commenced, so much did my enjoyment then exceed all that I had known before. Every day she evinced in her character some new and admirable feature; the more I saw of her, the more cause saw I to congratulate myself I had been blessed with so rare a partner. Her love for me looked to be mingled with an honourable pride, that made it all the more flattering to one of my disposition. None could seem so exceeding content—none could have appeared so truly affectionate. It may be easily imagined, my love of praise at this time partook largely of a desire of having my wife as famously commended; in fact, it was the same identical feeling, for I looked on the Lady Blanche as the best and dearest part of myself; and I wished to see her pre-eminence in every goodly quality universally acknowledged, because any contrary opinions might reflect unfavourably on the other portion of me.

"At this period, to add to her other powerful claims upon my love, she promised to become a mother—an event I looked forward to with an interest which exceedeth all conceiving. Then it was there came on a visit to me a young kinsman of mein. I had heard rumours of his being of a wild reckless disposition; and that he bore himself more carelessly than became any one wishing to be honourably thought of. I liked not this. It grieved me that one in any way related to me, should be so ill reported. One day I took him aside and told him what I had heard to his disadvantage, but he swore so solemnly he had not deserved what was said of him, that I could not help believing he had been maligned as he declared, by false envious persons. I then counselled him to marry some worthy woman which would put a stop to such slanders for the future, and pointed to the happiness I enjoyed as the best inducement to it he could have; but he answered somewhat confusedly, that some often considered themselves exceeding happy from ignorance of matters, which, when known, would make them the miserablest persons in the world. Thereupon I said such might be the case, but as regarded myself there could be no possibility of such a thing. He replied very earnestly, 'long may you think so,' and with a deep sigh left me to my own reflections.

"My kinsman had ever shewn to me a marvellous frank and social spirit; but of late I had noticed that he rather avoided me—gazed on me with a countenance full of pity, and when he talked, spoke with an ambiguous and mysterious fashion, of which I could make nothing, save a lamentation that villany should be so fairly disguised. I marvelled, and not without an indefinable uneasiness, at such sort of speech, but though I pressed him to explain himself, he would only shake his head, and say it was a thing he had not the heart to do. Following close upon the heels of this, he would oft regret that so noble a gentleman as myself should be so grossly imposed upon; and that, out of extreme love for me, those who knew of the cheat, should be forced to allow its continuance. All these hints and inuendos, and the mysterious manner in which they were uttered, in time produced in me a most fearful state of anxiousness and disquietude. It looked as though some extraordinary mischief was impending, known only by this kinsman, who liked not the office of breaking such ill news, but in what quarter it threatened, or in what shape it was to appear, I was completely at a loss; and what made the matter worse, so seemed likely to remain.

"At last he dropped something concerning of my dishonour. I fired at the word. My whole nature was stirred as if with a mighty earthquake. We were alone. I presently declared to him did he not tell me on the instant the cause of what he had said, I would slay him where he stood. He begged and prayed most movingly I would let him off a task he so hugely misliked, but the more earnestly he strove to excuse himself, the more fiercely I insisted on his declaring to me whatever there might be to say. Then he added with extreme seriousness, that the consequence must rest with me—that I was hurrying on to meet my misery; but if I would force the secret from him, that I must give him my assurance to take no measures, or show to any one a knowledge of it, till he had given such proofs of its correctness as he had at his disposal. This I solemnly promised. My ears drunk in with horror the tale he told me; it was that once being out late he had observed a gallant at the dead hour of the night ascending by a ladder of ropes to the Lady Blanche's chamber—so strange a sight made him marvel exceedingly, and he stopped to see what would follow. The gallant entered the chamber, and there remained upwards of an hour. When he again appeared at the window there was a female in his company, and they there embraced very fondly. Then he descended to the ground and made off, and the ladder was immediately drawn up into the chamber. I felt as I could have torn my intelligencer limb from limb; for if angels had sworn matter of the like tendency, I would not have credited a word of it; but I dissembled so much of my passion as to ask him if he recognised the female he saw at the window. He said he did, for he had such view of her as could not mislead him. I bade him without fail confess to me who it was. He replied on no account could he do so, as it might lead to irreparable mischiefs: and added, that he had gone to the same place at the same hour every night since, and had witnessed the same proceedings.

"But I would have the name; and by dint of threats, and repeated promises to behold the proofs he spoke of, I gained it from him. It was the countess. This I had anticipated from the foregoing; but on his confirming my suspicions, I contented myself for the present with determining in my own mind to bestow a proper punishment on so vile a traducer. However I demanded of him to lead me to the spot where he had seen what he had related, fully convinced I should there at once disprove every particular of his relation. Till the hour appointed I kept myself as quiet as I could, though my restlessness must have been evident to all. I said to none what I had heard. The countess retired to her chamber somewhat earlier than usual, but this I ought to have looked for, knowing the state in which she was. Her manner was in no way different from the ordinary, save she would have it I ailed something, asserting she had never seen me look so strangely, and imploring me to take heed of my health. To one, like myself, who placed such immense importance on honourable opinion, what had been told by my kinsman was like enough to produce very terrible consequences. Certes, I would not allow of its possibility; yet, for all that, I was filled with apprehensions almost as unendurable as the most perfect conviction could have been.

"To my great relief, midnight arrived, and wrapping ourselves in large cloaks, my kinsman and I proceeded behind some trees, at a convenient distance from the Lady Blanche's chamber window. The night was somewhat dusky; but not, as I thought, dark enough to prevent our seeing objects as far off as was required. There I stood with the full intention of punishing my companion's treachery as speedily as it might become manifest. Having waited a considerable time and seen nothing, I had just commenced denouncing, with the fiercest bitterness, his baseness in striving to impose on me with so improbable a tale, when he caught hold of me forcibly by the arm, crying 'hush!' and pointed in a certain direction. To my exceeding astonishment I then beheld a man closely wrapped up, stealing, with extreme cautiousness, towards the house. My wonder became the greater when I observed him stop exactly underneath my wife's chamber window, and clap his hands thrice; and nought could exceed the strange amazement I was in when I noticed a female open the window and throw out a ladder of ropes, on which the gallant mounted rapidly—the two caressed at the window with every sign of mutual fondness, and the next moment the ladder was drawn up, and they disappeared.

"I could not very plainly distinguish the features of the lady, but the figure was manifest beyond all mistaking. No one in the house was in the same state; and the dress, too, was equally evident. It was the countess. The horror, the shame, the rage, the indignation with which I was filled at this discovery, made me incapable of motion—nay, I stood breathless, as though I had been turned to stone. My senses were a complete whirlpool of furious passions. I knew not what to be about:—all in me bespoke a confused, bewildered, desperate madness. My kinsman asking me what should be done, roused me to a proper consciousness. I bade him remain where he was, and if the gallant, whoever he might be, sought to escape by the window, to fall upon him and hold him fast till I returned. At that he drew his sword, and swore very earnestly he should not escape alive. I then hastened into the house. All slept—or appeared to sleep. There was a death-like quiet in every part of the mansion, that seemed in marvellous contrast to the wild riot in my breast. I gained the door of my wife's chamber. For the first time I had so found it, it was locked. This discovery added fuel to the fire. I strove with all my might to break it open. It was too strong to be so forced, but the violence of the shock I had given it brought my wife to it presently. She inquired, in some seeming alarm, 'who was there?' I answered, commanding her to open the door immediately. It was done.

"On my entrance she complained somewhat of my disturbing her rest so strangely. I gave a rapid survey of the chamber, and not finding him I sought for, I fixed a fierce look on my wife, who was gazing on me, as it seemed, in the confusion of conscious guilt. At this moment I heard the clashing of swords, and running to the casement, observed my kinsman fighting furiously with the same person I had seen enter the countess's chamber. The ladder of ropes had been left attached to the window, and I was proceeding to descend by it, when my faithless wife caught hold of my arm, and implored me not to venture myself into any danger. I took this as a crafty design to assist the escape of her paramour, and with violent execrations rudely thrust her from me, and, as rapidly as I could, descended the ladder. Ere I had got to the bottom I beheld my kinsman fall, and his opponent take to flight. I pursued, thirsting with the horriblest vengeance, but at the distance of about a hundred yards, to my infinite rage and disappointment, I beheld him mount a fleet steed, and ride off at a pace that left all pursuit hopeless.

"I returned to my kinsman, and found him bleeding, and from his manner appearing to have been badly hurt. I assisted him into the house; but this took some time to do, for he complained at every step, that he could scarce endure the motion. I at last got him to his chamber. I found the house in the same quietness as it had been when I had entered it a short time previous; and its undisturbed state gave me a hope I might still conceal my dishonour from the world—a hope I eagerly caught at. I extracted from my wounded kinsman a solemn oath, that what he had known and seen should never pass his lips; then proceeded I to the chamber of a servant of mine, who had lived all his life in my family, and in whose fidelity I could place implicit confidence. I called him up, and as briefly as I could, acquainted him with what had transpired. He readily enough promised to do whatever I might require at his hands. I then sent him to call up my kinsman's servant, whilst I proceeded to my lady's chamber. I found her lying on the floor senseless. I placed her in her bed. In a short time, she began to exhibit signs of consciousness, and with it gave me reason to believe she was about to become a mother. Thereupon I hastened to the stables, saddled me a horse, and rode at the top of his speed to the nearest midwife; and blindfolding her, and taking every possible precaution, that she should not know where she was going, I brought her back with me. She did her office. As soon as I became aware of the child's birth, I snatched it from her hand, and hurried with it to the next chamber, where my faithful Adam was waiting as I had desired, and to him I gave it, with strict commands that instant to drown it in the deepest part of the Avon, which he vowed to do in such a manner as should prevent the slightest clue to discovery. Then I hurried the midwife away with the same secrecy with which I had brought her.

"On my return, Adam acquainted me that he had fulfilled my intentions to the very letter, which gave me inexpressible satisfaction, for there was at least a riddance of one witness to my dishonour. To the false woman, its mother, I had resolved on satisfying my just vengeance by a punishment worse than death. None of the domestics were yet stirring, and I gave orders on no account should any be allowed to go to their lady's chamber, on the plea she was in so bad a state she was not expected to live. Thus I prevented her being seen by any of the domestics for several days, during which time my kinsman was confined to his own chamber by the hurt he had received, and therefore remained in as perfect ignorance of what was going on as the rest. In the meanwhile, with the assistance of my faithful Adam, everything was privily being done as I desired. It was reported by him, that the countess was daily getting worse, and at last, to their infinite great grief and sorrowing, it was given out she was dead. A sumptuous funeral was prepared. I had every sign of mourning placed about the mansion; and those signs I have never allowed to be removed. But before the performance of the funeral obsequies, I had secretly removed the countess from her chamber to another part of the building, which had hitherto been scarcely ever used.

"Here was she shut up close from all knowledge, save Adam and myself. He hath never seen her from the date of her imprisonment till the present time, nor hath she since then been allowed to behold any human being but myself, her so deeply injured husband: for such was my intended punishment. All common necessaries she had, but her clothing was reduced to a coarse mourning habit. Thus I had secured my honour, but as I speedily found, at the expense of my peace of mind. Lady Blanche made but one attempt to turn me from my purpose, and that was at the birth of her offspring; but finding it needless, she never after sought to move my commiseration with a single word, and seemed to have resigned herself to the justice of her sentence. At first, I took a sensible satisfaction in shewing myself to her, clad in the trappings of woe.

I declared to her what I had done, and told her she was as dead to me as she was to the world; but in consideration of the virtues she had assumed, my mourning for her should only cease with my life. She bowed her head submissively, and replied, she was well content it should be so since I had so willed it: but before any very long time had passed, I began to have doubts that the manner in which I had endeavoured to keep the secret of my dishonour, was less dishonourable than would have been its publicity. An act which vengeance had not allowed me to see in its proper colours, now stood before me in all its horrible injustice. I could easily reconcile my conscience to any punishment of a guilty wife, but the murder of an innocent poor babe seemed incapable of any justification.

"Nought in this world can exceed the fierce struggles I have had to satisfy myself with the deed; but conscience, instead of being overpowered by them, appeared to grow the stronger after every encounter. Previously, my dishonour, great as it might be, was occasioned by no fault of mine own, and by some, I doubted not, my reputation would have stood in no way affected by it; but so ruthless a murder as that I had planned and put in practice, I felt was a crime of the blackest die, the whole guilt of which was mine, and if it was made public, I believed I should be condemned and shunned of all men. Remorse pursued me wherever I went. Sleeping or waking the deed haunted me. I was perpetually goaded with the reflexion that Urban de la Pole, who had won so many titles of pre-eminence, had now made himself irrevocably on a level with the basest and vilest in the land. Yet all this time I sought as urgently as ever to excuse myself, by every manner of argument. Sometimes I succeeded, but only for a brief space; and again I was tortured by the same dreadful feelings of self-condemnation.

"Years passed on; but every year appeared to increase my sufferings, and time added to my misery, till it moved me like a madness. During this long space the countess bore her imprisonment without a murmur—she never once complained of her privations—she never once sought to reproach me for such stern usage of her—she never once, by word, look, or sign, intimated to me the slightest desire to change her way of life. Whenever I presented myself to her, she wore a contented submissive look, which through twenty years of rigorous confinement hath remained the same. I found out at last, that instead of punishing her I was punishing myself. My sufferings were becoming intolerable, whilst she did not seem to suffer in any manner. Still I at all times noticed in her an expression of countenance which I felt deeply, but I cannot describe. It seemed to appeal to me more strongly than the most conspicuous shew of wretchedness could have done; and yet it was not one of wretchedness. It invariably made me, on my leaving her, ask of myself, why I continued to bury her in so merciless a manner? and then followed a raging storm of conflicting opinions for and against her, in which remorse for the murder I had perpetrated took its full share. But in the end, I felt that death alone had the power of affording her release.

"My kinsman, although he had got hurt entirely in his zeal for me, I could not bear the sight of. I know not why it was, but I looked on him as the cause of my misery. He it was who had first wakened me from the dream of happiness and honour in which I had been indulging; and I thanked him not for his painstaking. When he was well of his wound, I hastened his departure; and though he doth occasionally pay me visits, the only part of them that pleaseth me is when he turneth his back to be gone. Since thou hast been with me I have seen nothing of him, for which I am infinitely thankful; but I am in daily expectation of hearing of his arrival. His nature and mine can have no sort of assimilation. He never comes but he goads me into a frenzy with his consolations and condolences, and a thousand foolish speeches that call to my mind my dishonour and my crime. Now I dread his presence worse than ever, for the fangs of remorse have worked in my heart such deep wounds, methinks such probing as his must needs destroy me quite. It is with the knowledge of my growing weakness, and noting that my faithful Adam is getting old apace, and witnessing thy extreme affectionateness, that I came to the determination of putting such confidence in thee as to require thy attendance on the countess in place of myself.

"Thou hast not sought this secret of me. I have seen such vouchers for thy honourable nature that I could trust thee, as I now do, with the custody of my very soul. But remember, as I told thee, that if thy disposition revolteth at the idea of serving a murderer, I hold thee free to go at any time, and will take most careful heed thy going shall do thee credit. As for myself I can only say, could a thousand years of severest suffering undo the deed, I would set about it with a cheerful spirit. Now tell me, I prythee, what thou art inclined to do. I offer thee no reward for staying, and doing me this great service, save my undivided love and most absolute gratitude; shouldst thou choose to go, I will enrich thee for life. Make thy choice."

"My lord, surely you cannot doubt my choice," replied Bertram, in a most winning, affectionate manner. "I do as sorely lament the deed that hath been done as can you; but our lamentations will never lessen its enormity. Still from what I have just learned, I cannot help perceiving you have had monstrous provocation; but provocation that justified the crime I cannot say—for methinks there can be no justification where there is a crime—or no crime where a justification can be allowed. Nevertheless, I must surely be made of most base materials, were you twenty times as criminal as you are, were I to desert you after you have put such entire confidence in me. Believe me, my lord, my love for you is of such a sort that I desire of all things to serve you in honesty and faithfulness my whole life through; and shall think my fortune desperate, indeed, when it cometh to me in such ill shape as my being forced to leave so kind a master."

The earl gave no answer to this earnest and loving speech, unless it were he replied by his looks; which, truly,, appeared to be full of right eloquent expression. He presently continued :—

"Thou hast had opportunity for noticing that a portion of this bookcase hath been ingeniously contrived to be a secret door, known only to myself and my faithful Adam. This opens into a passage, beyond which is a chamber, which is no other than the prison of my false countess. There for twenty years she, a daughter of one of the noblest families, hath endured such privations as the commonest menial scarce ever is forced to resort to. I would have thee now go to her and acquaint her with my desire thou shouldst attend to her wants in place of myself."

The page readily arose to fulfil his errand, and the secret door being opened he passed through it. Now he experienced most strange feelings—an infinite dread and dislike of appearing before this dangerous bad woman, who had done such terrible mischiefs. He could not tolerate the infamy she had brought on herself, knowing, as he did, the noble nature of the man she had so basely wronged, and therefore thought not her confinement to be too great a punishment for her crime. He therefore prepared himself to meet a woman whom he should thoroughly detest at the first glance—one whose attractions must have faded under the rigour of such long imprisonment, and whose state, the lack of ordinary attendance had made slovenly in attire and uncleanly in person. He pictured too, in his mind, her prison to be exceeding dirty, cheerless, and neglectful. His surprise may be imagined, when he entered where everything was as comfortable, neat, and orderly, as in the best apartment in the mansion. Nothing could be so cleanly as seemed every part of the chamber, and the only sign of cheerlessness it had was its being entirely covered up with black cloth.

If he was so greatly surprised with the prison, he was far more so with the prisoner. He beheld before him a lady of extreme beauty, looking to be in the very pride of life. She was dressed simply in a black robe, but the most splendid apparel could not have shown to more advantage her majestic figure, or given such admirable contrast to her noble countenance. She was sitting reading of a book, at the entrance of the page; but as soon as she noticed him she started up in a great marvel. Her wonder was not without cause, for not having seen any human being save her lord for so long a space, she could not but be infinitely astonished at the presence of him she now beheld. Truly, at any place Bertram was no common sight, for by this time the haggard, sickly expression which long sickness and suffering had left on his features, when he first entered the house, was changed to one of health and comfort, wherein the softness of early youth was made more winning by the sweet and pensive melancholy with which his handsome features were overcast. Now, with his intelligent eyes radiant with wonder as he gazed on the beautiful woman before him, he looked more handsome than ever he had been whilst in his present abode. His hair, in rich profusion, fell down even to the white falling bands spread open round his neck, which added much to the picturesque expression of his countenance, and his close-fitting suit was famously adapted to display to the most notable advantage the grace and symmetry of his limbs.

After having thus wondrously gazed on each other for a many seconds, the Lady Blanche at last broke the strange silence by inquiring of the youth his errand. He spoke it with so gentle a courteousness that none could help being charmed with him, but the countess took his message in very sorrowful part.

"I pray you, tell me, young sir, for what cause is it my lord refuseth to see me?" inquired she in a most urgent manner.

"His health, lady, is getting to be in so decayed a state, it preventeth him," replied the page.

"Alack!" exclaimed the Lady Blanche. "I have marked his changed aspect a long time past. Whilst I was allowed sight of him I cared not for being shut out from the world, for from the first time I heard of his gallant name, he hath been all the world to me. But now I feel I am punished indeed. I beseech you, gentle sir, implore him for me that I may attend on him in his illness. No servant shall serve him more humbly or more truly, than his once happy and honoured Blanche. Ah, me! How wildly do I talk;" added the countess, suddenly changing her ardent, impassioned manner, to one of strict patience and submissiveness. "Nay, if it is my lord's will, it must needs be. Tell him, gentle sir, I am ready to fulfil his wishes."

When Bertram left her, his lord's faithless wife, whom a short time before he had felt so disposed to detest from his heart, he found he could not bring himself to mislike her in any manner; nay, she had awakened in him feelings of a direct opposite tendency. He marvelled, a guilty woman could bear such rigorous imprisonment so long a time and it have no evident effect on her, he marvelled more, with the knowledge of her infamous evil doing, she should wear so noble, bright a countenance; but all this could not erase from his mind the impression of his lord's narrative. He remembered the terribleness of the wrong she had wantonly done so noble a gentleman, and strove to fortify his heart against the entrance of those feelings, her language, looks, and manner, had created in him; nevertheless, he found his thoughts taking to themselves the shape of this question. "Surely, this lady is not so wicked as I thought her."

On returning to the earl, he told him every syllable the countess had uttered in his hearing, at which the former appeared exceeding moved, asked divers questions, hurriedly and anxiously, as to how she spoke, and what she had said; and every answer manifestly did the more increase his uneasiness. For awhile he seemed lost in thought—but it was easy to see from the changing expression of his aspect—his deep sighing, and violent hard breathing, that some such struggle as had been but too common with him, was going on in his nature. Bertram stood observing him with a sincere, sweet sympathy, expressed in every feature of his countenance; but saying never a word, knowing how useless was speech on such occasions. After a time the earl recovered sufficiently to express what he would have done.

"Methinks, 'tis full time this punishment should cease;" said he in a somewhat faltering voice. "I can endure it no longer. This marvellous sweet patience of hers subdues me. My vengeance is gone, of my honour I am careless. Go, tell her, she is free to go where she will, so long as I may never have sight of her again."

The page hastened to do his lord's bidding, his thoughts by the way, busy in the entertainment of every possible prejudice against that false bad woman who had brought such fearful sufferings upon her generous, noble-hearted husband. He determined to look on her as a very monster—an ungrateful, base creature, lost to every sense of womanly excellence; and expedite her removal from the mansion by all means in his power. He presented himself to the lady a second time, and despite of his recent stern determinations, delivered his message as gently as though he spoke to some person great in his respect. The countess heard it in evident emotion. Her cheek grew pale and then red, of a sudden—her lips quivered somewhat—but in the end her whole countenance expressed a lofty pride and noble majesty, which made her young companion marvel more than ever.

"It cannot be;" replied she at last. "Were I again to appear in the public eye, perchance my lord's reputation would suffer; he having for so long a period allowed it to be closed against me. If my character hath gone, my death is no fiction. To what my lord hath sentenced me I patiently submit,—unless I can be wholly restored to his affections, which, methinks, 'tis vain to hope, I wish here to live out my days, to the last his poor prisoner, and humble, loving wife: and I will pray for him very earnestly on the knees of my heart that he may enjoy every manner of happiness that is most to his liking. I beseech you, gentle sir, tell him this much from me—that I will endure with all proper submissiveness, whatever he shall think fitting, but for his own sake, he must not in any way think of letting the world know of my existence: and the only favour I would ask of him is, that he will let me here remain till I have become the thing he hath feigned."

Again there was a change in the page's thoughts of his lord's faithless wife; his feelings were now in her favour as strong as admiration could make them. Her language, her look, her bearing, savoured so marvellous little of guilty consciousness, that he could not help saying to himself on leaving her. "Surely this lady cannot have done the wickedness with which she is charged." He acquainted the earl with what had passed in consequence of his message, whereupon the unhappy man seemed more moved than before, for he presently broke out into a wonderful great passion of self accusations.

"Every word of hers cometh upon me like a scourge!" exclaimed he, when his frenzy had somewhat abated, "I have made a terrible mistake; I have been torturing of myself all this while, instead of punishing her. O reputation! reputation! what a poor idol of brass thou art!" And in this strain went he on, so much to the exceeding grief of his faithful Bertram, that he knew not what judgment to come to. He could not believe his lord had mis-stated to him anything, having had such manifold proofs of his extreme honourableness of nature, therefore he must needs consider the countess to be the very basest wretch breathing; and yet he could not think ill of that lady, after having beheld in her, as he had, behaviour so thoroughly opposed to an unworthy disposition. He considered much of the matter; his reflections suddenly turned into a new channel, and, as he left the chamber, he put this question to himself—"Surely, there is some huge villany at the bottom of these woeful doings!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Knight. Avaunt, kankered churle! fro whence comest thou?
Plowm. Marry! folysh, pevysh daw! even fro my plow.
How sayst? Woldst anything therewithall?
Merch. Ye, mercy! thou lewyd villayn and rud raskale!
It is for this fole yll beseemyng
To perturb any gentylmen's talking!
Plowm. Gentylmen! ye gentylmen? Jak Herying!
Put your shone in your bosom for weryng!
I do accompt myself—by Goddys body!
Better than you both, and more worthy!

RASTALL (*Gentylness and Nobylytye.*)

This company were lightly the lewdest in the land—apt for pillery, perjury, forgery, or any other villany.

GREENE (*Groatsworth of Witte.*)

"Oh twine fresh roses round thy brow
And pledge the wine-cup high;
Leave fears and cares to misers' heirs,
Leave tears to those who sigh.
For is there 'neath heav'n a bliss so divine
As that which now beams in the sparkling wine?
Brighter than gems
In kings' diadems,
And fragrant as buds upon odorous stems.
Then fill to the brim! Fill to the brim!
Fill whilst such joys on the green earth abound,
'Ere Pleasure grow pensive or Friendship look dim,
Fill to the brim around!

"Oh twine fresh roses round thy brow,
And pledge me once again;
Till we have quaff'd the rosy draught
And warmed the heart and brain.
Our life is but short and our pleasures but few,
And Time makes us old when our youth is but new:—
Wine then alone,—
To all be it known,—
Can grant us new life and a world of our own.
Then fill to the brim! Fill to the brim!
Fill whilst such joys on the green earth abound,
Ere Pleasure grows pensive or Friendship looks dim,
Fill to the brim around!

"Bravo, Robin! O, my life, our sweet Robin is a brave songster!"
"Excellent well sung, as I live, Master Greene; and as Kit Mar-

lowe most aptly calleth thee, thou art our own delectable sweet Robin."

"Nay, Chettle, we will not have him so mean a bird; he is a swan at the very least."

"Ay, truly, Master Lodge, by this hand, a good thought. A swan —a very swan! What sayest, Peele? What sayest, Kid? What sayest, Nash? Is not Greene as right famous a swan at singing, as though he were the mighty Jove himself, going a birding after the delicate fashion told in the old story?"

"Prythee keep to the Robin, good Kid!" replied the singer, in the same merry humour with his boisterous companions; "methinks the conceit of the swan is somewhat dangerous, it being a bird so nigh in feather to a goose."

"Nay, nay, there is a huge difference in the holding of the head," cried Kit Marlowe, laughingly; "so if it chance to be thou art only but a goose, if thou wilt but have thy neck stretched, thou shalt presently be the braver bird, beyond all contradicting!"

"Then is Tyburn a choice place for swan-hopping!" observed Lodge, amid the uproarious mirth of his associates.

"More wine! more wine! tapster!" bawled Chettle; "Slight! after such moving praise of thy liquor, thou shouldst empty thy casks for us, and charge nothing."

"Ay, by Bacchus, that thou shouldst, out of sheer gratitude," added Nash.

"Truly, my masters; and for mine own part, I care not," said a miserable-looking, threadbare knave, in a most abject manner, "indeed, I care not in any sort of manner; yet, as I cannot live unless I sell my liquor at some profit, I humbly beseech your worships, pardon me, that I would rather live and sell, than give away and be ruined."

These were a party of play-writers, met together round a rough table, in a mean chamber of a common inn, near the Globe playhouse, on the Bankside: they seemed to be much alike as regarded their humours, being a set of as wild, licentious, unbridled roysterers, as might be met with in any tavern in Christendom. It was manifest on a little stay with them, that they had more wit than discretion, and less honesty than either; for their talk was either of tricks they had practised, when reduced to any shifts, or abuse of certain players they misliked, or slander of certain writers, whose success they envied. Their dress smacked of a tawdry gentility; in some instances showing signs of shabbiness, that could not be hid, in others of expense that could not be afforded; for these worthies were of that unthinking sort, who feast to-day and fast to-morrow; carry their purses well lined on a Monday, and ere the week hath half gone, have not a groat. So improvident were they, that they would have their canary for an hour or two's enjoyment, though they should be reduced to take their custom to the water-bearer, for a month after; and of so little principle were the greater number, that as long as they could get such indulgences as they most affected, which were often of an exceeding disreputable sort, they cared not a jot whether they had or had not in their power the means of paying. Nevertheless, divers of them were men of approved talent in their art; but this, methinks, should draw on them greater censures; for when men have knowledge, and use it not honourably, they should be accounted infinitely more blameable, than such as offend through ignorance.

"Ha; ha! by this light a most admirably conceited jest, my dear boy," exclaimed Greene, who by the way, was a marvellous different person from Tom Greene the player. "But what dost think of *this* for a goodly example of coney-catching. There hath been a certain publisher to me, who is known well enough to all here, requesting of me to write him something. I asked of him of what kind, and thereupon he spoke so movingly of the great good—to say nought of the great profits that come of pious writings, that on the instant I offered to compose a repentance of my monstrous sinful life, which should be so forcibly penned that the wickedest persons that live should take example of it, and straightway fall into godliness. At this surely no man was ever in such huge delight as was my saint-like seller of books; and he offered me such fair terms for a pamphlet of this tendency, that I closed with him presently. Since then, I have commenced my repentance; and I can say most truly few have ever repented them their sins with such profit as have I; but the jest of it lieth in this—that my gain by such labour must needs lead me into fresh outbreaks, which at my need will form goodly materials for another repentance, still more cunningly to be wrought out for the edification of strayed sheep, which will again enrich my exchequer for advancing me through a new career of revelry, to be followed of course by the most pitiful repentance of any. And in this manner mean I to live sinning, and repenting, and repenting and sinning, till there shall be no good to be reaped by it, either for myself or any other."

Riotous shouts of laughter, and a famous store of sharp witty sayings, not worthy of being written, accompanied this speech; and there was not one there present who did not appear to regard it as as fine a jest as ever they heard.

"O' my word, but this is delicate coney-catching indeed!" cried Nash, joining heartily in the same humour. "When I am hard pushed I will not fail following such exquisite proper example; and I only hope I shall have grace sufficient to turn it to as notable great advantage."

"This sheweth the utter foolishness of such matters," exclaimed Kit Marlowe—a noted infidel, "and proveth that if you bait your discourse sufficiently with religion, you may have in your power as many gulls as can get within reach of it. But hearken to the rare trick I played my hostess when I was reduced to such shifts for lodgings I scarce knew where I should find my lying for the next day. This woman was coarse and fat, and a desperate shrew; and I being somewhat backward in paying her pestilent charges, she opened her battery on me at all hours, and at last swore very roundly I should to prison and out of her house, did I not settle what I owed by a certain day. Now it fortunately chanced so to hap, her villanous house had two doors, one front and one back, and she being usually in a front chamber, put me upon practising my wit in such a manner as should most punish her, and most enrich me. So I prevailed on a broker of my acquaintance to purchase of me all the goods in my lodging, on the condition that they should be removed when I desired. Having got the money the day before the day appointed for my paying the grasping old avarice my hostess, I went to her chamber, and told her I had come to settle with her her charges, which put her into so rare a humour, that I kept her a full hour talking and jesting, with the money in my hand. Then thinking the broker had, as I designed, removed the old dame's chattels by the back door and got clear off, I begged she would let me have of her some sort of memorandum of the cancelling of my debt, and quickly commenced counting of my money on the table. My request she thought so reasonable, she lost not a moment in seeking to gratify it; but the instant I heard her proceeding to an upper room where I knew she kept her pen and ink, I whipped up the money and was out of the front door ere I could draw breath. Truly, it must have been most absolute and irresistible sport, to have noted the visage of my chap-fallen hostess when she discovered not only the loss of her money she was so desperate about, but the departure of her lodger leaving of his lodging bare to the very walls."

This narrative was received with more riotous acclamations than the preceding, and divers others of the company told the like sort of tales, to the excessive mirth of the rest, who looked upon them as most admirable jests; and thus they kept drinking and shewing of their several humours. After some time they commenced talking of the players, and not one was named who, in their thinking, possessed the slightest share of merit. Greene was a mere ape—the elder Burbage a scarecrow—the younger a poor fellow that marred every thing he spoke, for lack of sense enough to know the meaning on't, and Hemings and Condell very twins of stupidness, who could do nought but strut and fume, and blunder through such parts as they undertook to play; and so they proceeded with nigh upon all the players, accompanying their opinions with marvellous lamentations their plays should be so ill handled.

"Hast marked this new player, my master?" inquired Greene.

"What him they call Shakspeare?" asked Marlowe.

"Ay," answered his companion. "Didst ever note so senseless foolish a person? Marry, if there shall be found in him a greater commodity of brains than may serve him to truss his points withal, I have an infinite lack of penetration."

"'Slight, my dog would make a better player!" exclaimed Marlowe, contemptuously. "Didst ever see any finger-post hold itself so stiffly? Didst ever find a drunken tinker so splutter his words! He hath as little grace in his action as a costard-monger's jackass; and as for his aspect, I could get as much dignity out of a three-legged stool."

"Well, well, he cannot do us great harm by his playing," observed Lodge. "He is only put into the very poorest parts that are written."

"Which he maketh a monstrous deal poorer by his wretched performance," added Greene.

"But who is this Shakspeare?" inquired Nash.

"A very clown," replied Marlowe. "A fellow that hath left the plough's tail and his brother clods of the soil, in such utter conceit of himself as to imagine he could become a famous player."

"He deserveth the whipping-post for his monstrous impudence," said Peele.

"Give him a cap and bells, and dress him in motley," added Kyd.

"Nay, I doubt he hath even wit enough to pass for a fool," cried Greene, amid the contemptuous laughter of his companions; and so went they on turning the edge of their wits upon the new player, till the door opening, there entered with young Burbage the very person they were so sharp upon. In an instant the whole company hailed "the poor fellow that marred every thing he spoke, for lack of sense to know the meaning on't," as though none could be so well esteemed of them.

"Sit thee down, my prince of players!" cried Marlowe.

"Excellent Dick, I drink thy health," exclaimed Greene, in the same extreme friendliness of manner.

"A pint of wine, tapster, for Master Burbage!" shouted Lodge, who had a new play in hand, and thought it good policy to be in a generous humour with the manager's son.

"Truly, a good thought," added Nash, who was more famous for commending of another's generosity than of taking it as an example. "It would be a notable remissness in us, to one to whose admirable choice playing we stand so much indebted for the success of our plays, were we not at all times to welcome him with open arms."

"Truly, I am beholden to you greatly," replied young Burbage, sitting down amongst them, by the side of his companion. "I shall be glad enough, I warrant you, to do my best in your honourable service, in especial when it cometh to be followed by such fair wages. But your bountiful goodness hath emboldened me to ask a like liberal welcome for my friend here, Will Shakspeare, whose true social qualities, perchance, will lead you, ere long, to thank me for his acquaintance." Thereupon every one of the company greeted the stranger with as absolute cordiality as ever was seen.

"O' my word, I have taken great note of you, Master Shakspeare," exclaimed Marlowe. "You promise well, sir; by this light you do! I have not seen a young player take to his art so readily since I first beheld a play."

"Indeed you have the requisites, young sir, of a complete master of playing," added Greene. "You will shine. You will be more famous than any of your day. You will show the whole world how far an English player can exceed all that hath been done of the ancients." The others followed in the same vein, as if one was striving to exceed the other in the extravagance of panegyric: to this the young player replied very modestly, as he at that moment believed them to be sincere. This modest manner of his seemed to convey to his new associates an idea that he was of a poor spirit, as well as vain enough to take to himself anything in the shape of compliment, so they commenced covertly making of him their butt, passing sly jests at his expense, and in pretended compliments seeking to be terribly satirical; all which he took in such a manner as seemed to strengthen them in their small opinion of him. Doubtless, this made them somewhat bolder with their wits.

"I pray you now, listen to me, master countryman," said Marlowe, as if with a monstrous affectionateness. "I will give you famous advice, I promise you. As to your walk, methinks 'tis well enough—it sheweth at least you are inclined to put your best leg foremost, if you knew which it was; but methinks you are somewhat too long in making up your mind which should have precedence. As to your look, let it pass—it cannot be bettered—I defy any one to shew such a face for a player. Then for your arms—to make them swing like the sails of a windmill, is a new grace in motion, and, I doubt not, will take exceedingly with the groundlings: but, perchance of the two styles you most affect, that in which you seem as though you were holding of a plough, is the most delicately natural. I commend it wondrously, only I would have you turn out your elbows more than you do—it seemeth as if you determined to make for yourself elbow-room. Lastly, of your voice—O' my life, I never heard a carter with a better voice; and the way you deliver your speeches, as though you were talking to a horse, must be infinitely effective on a stage: but I would have you speak louder—let the apprentices in the topmost scaffold know you have lungs, and can use them to some purpose. To keep up a good bawling is highly commendable."

"Ay indeed, that is it," added Greene, after the same fashion, "some there are of the sock and buskin who play a feeble old man with the throat of a boatswain; but when you come on as a courtier, looking so much the sturdy hind, one fancieth every moment you will be feeding of hogs or thrashing of corn, which to my thinking is exceeding more wonderful."

Others of their companions went on in the same biting humour, the object of it all the whilst, to the marvelling of young Burbage who saw their drift,—taking what they said with a show of notable simplicity, without offering a reply. At last when he thought they had exhausted their wit he spoke.

"I thank you heartily, my masters, for your excellent counsel," replied he very gravely. "Believe me I do not undervalue it, knowing that the very meanest things that breathe may oft do a wondrous fine service—as witness the cackling of the geese that saved Rome. Some of you have been good enough, in commending of my perfections, to speak famously of several of the notablest parts of my body; but divers qualities of them have been left untold; the which, for the lack of a better chronicler, I will now seek to give you some notion of. He who spoke so movingly of my legs, forgot to add, that on an occasion, they could kick an impudent shallow coxcomb to his heart's content. Of my face it is as God made it. Perchance it would have been better gifted, had any of such persons as are here given it the benefit of their greater skill, for I doubt not I could prove in a presently, some of you possess a very marvellous facility in the making of faces. As for my arms, doubtless they have a sort of swing with them, I having in me so much of the sturdy hind; but though sometimes it is my hap to come where the hogs feed themselves, the threshing part of my supposed duty I am ready enough to perform, as long as there is such necessity for it as there appeareth at present. And with regard to my voice, Master Marlowe, if I have in my speech at times past appeared, as though I were talking to a horse; surely, at this moment, there is in it a notable likelihood I am speaking to an ass."

No speech was ever received with such astonishment by any company, as the preceding. Every man of them seemed as much confounded as though they had raised a hornet; and, as the concluding sentences were so pointedly directed to the foremost of them in their sharp attack upon the so despised "Master Countryman," he was manifestly the most touched by it of them all.

"Fellow, dost address gentlemen in this style?" exclaimed he, as if half inclined to be in a rage.

"Truly, I think not," was the cutting reply.

"Nay 'tis all a jest of his, Master Marlowe," said young Burbage, endeavouring to keep the discomfitted wits in something like good humour, "he is the very admirablest fellow at such things that can be found any where; and try him at it when you will, you shall find him so expert at his weapon, there is no getting the better of him."

"O' my word, I cannot say much about getting the better of me," observed William Shakspeare, laughingly. "But can I serve any of this worthy company, assuredly they shall have the best of what ability I have." Such of the worthy company that had been in any way inclined for a quarrel, after sufficient note of "the sturdy hind," thought proper to look as if they were famously amused; and in honest truth, whether it was from his natural cheerful humour, or a desire to conciliate, the former so entertained them with his delectable choice wit, that presently the whole place was kept in a roar by him. In the midst of this the tapster came and whispered to Master Greene.

"Oh, let him up, let him up," replied he: then turning to the company, added, seeming in an exceeding pleasant mood, "Here is a certain well-known honest friend of mine, coming to join us, one Cutting Ball—he hath done me many services. Indeed, a right excellent good fellow is he, and a useful."

"I promise you," replied Marlowe, with a knowing wink, "Cutty standeth by you, out of return for your standing by his fair sister."

"Let that be as it may," cried the other, joining in the general laugh, "but to Master Ball I owe much; for he is so vigilant a watch, that he alloweth not a pestilent bailiff to show his nose within a mile of me; and if any should chance to come, seeking to make me their prisoner, Cutty and his fellows do so pay them my debts, that they are glad enough to 'scape with broken crowns, for lack of better coin."

These remarks were put an end to by the entrance of the object of them; but, to the surprise of all present, no sooner had he entered, than young Shakspeare jumped on his legs, stared at Cutting Ball, and Cutting Ball stared at him, though in a manner as if Cutty was somewhat confused.

"I greet you well, Captain Sack!" exclaimed the former at last; "I pray you tell me, how are your worthy, honourable companions, Master Sugarsop, and my Lord Cinnamon? Truly I should have been right glad had you brought them with you." Then addressing Greene, he continued in something of the same strain, evidently to the prodigious marvelling of the company. "Marry, Master Greene, but this same *honest friend* of yours and I are old acquaintance. Methinks if I could forget that stained velvet doublet, I could not put out of my memory a visage that hath so many marks to know it by. In brief, your honest friend, with two others of a like honesty, despoiled me a short distance from London, on the Uxbridge Road; and I pray you, make your honest friend return me the things he robbed me of, else shall I be obliged to introduce your honest friend to one Master Constable, who, if your honest friend shall get his deserts, may chance to assist him in making the acquaintance of one Master Hangman."

At hearing this, it was difficult to say which looked the most confounded, Master Greene or his honest friend; and as for the rest, few of them seemed to take the matter very pleasantly.

"Plague on't, Cutty, how couldst act so unworthily?" cried Marlowe, as if in a famous indignation.

"'Slight, man, 'tis monstrous!" exclaimed Nash, looking to be exceeding angered.

"O' my life! had I known thee to be so desperate a rogue, Cutty, I'd have been hanged ere I would have tolerated thy infamous company!" said Lodge, in a like fashion.

"S'blood! but you must give up what you have so basely taken, Master Ball," cried Kyd, "we will tolerate no such villany. Restore your ill-got booty, fellow."

"Ay, truly," added Greene, as sternly as any of them, "Give Master Shakspeare his goods again, I prythee. O' my word! I am ashamed thou shouldst act with so thorough a disgracefulness. I insist that thou give back every tittle of what thou hast taken."

"Of course! *of course!*" shouted one and all.

"I do confess, I made bold with certain things belonging to this good gentleman," replied Cutty Ball, seeing there was no use in denying the robbery; "but had I known he was a friend, I would have despoiled myself rather than have touched aught that belonged to him."

"I thank you, Captain Sack, or Cutty Ball, or whatever your name may be," answered young Shakspeare; "but I should thank you more, would you be so good as give me back those same things; for truly I stand so much in need of them, I shall be forced to get them with the assistance of such persons as I just now promised to make you acquainted with, should you not return them speedily."

"Ay, without doubt, and I will see to it myself," exclaimed Marlowe and others of his companions, who appeared equally intent upon making the thief restore what he had stolen.

"I'faith, I should be right glad enough to do it, honourable sir, only in honest truth, I have them not," said the thief.

"By this hand, that shall never pass," exclaimed Marlowe.

"O' my life, I will have thee get back these goods, even if thou hast parted with them," cried Greene, with equal earnestness.

"Bots on't, so will I if I can!" replied Cutty, somewhat sharply, "although I have not the honest gentleman's things, methinks he shall not have to go far to find them; for I have good reason for knowing Master Greene at this present hath on one of his shirts; and Master Marlowe a pair of his hose. Master Peel now weareth his falling bands; and Master Lodge had of me certain other articles of linen, which make up the whole of what I took."

Terrible was the confusion of these four worthies—who had been so forward in calling for restitution, at finding that they themselves possessed the plunder: nevertheless, with the best grace they could, they promised every thing should be restored to the lawful owner, protesting most vehemently, that when they accepted them, they believed them to be honestly come by: all which their friend Cutty Ball heard with an easy impudency, that did in some manner belie their assertions; and the young player, though having penetration enough to spy into the real nature of the transaction, appeared to be satisfied. Soon after Master Burbage, whispering to Lodge that the reading of his new play was fixed for twelve o' the clock, took his leave of the party, taking his friend with him.

"I thank thee, Will, for the very proper castigation of those fellows," exclaimed young Burbage, laughing heartily; "methinks they would now as lief meddle with a mad dog, as play their saucy humours on thee. Surely, never were a set of insolent biting jackanapes so quickly brought to their marrow-bones."

"Truly, they chafed me somewhat, or I would not have answered them so sharply," replied his companion.

It may here be proper to advertise the reader, that the young player had profited nothing by his introduction to Sir Philip Sydney, or by his falling in with his old friends, Sir Reginald and Sir Valentine, he not having informed them of his need before they left England for Flanders. Nor had his acquaintance with Master Spenser as yet availed him anything, for almost as soon as they became known to each other, that right famous poet had been forced to go a voyage to Ireland. For his becoming a player, he was solely indebted to the exertions of his schoolfellows, who absolutely forced their manager to make him one of their company. This the elder Burbage did, and with an especial ill grace, for no man relisheth doing anything against his will; but it was evident he had taken a huge dislike to the young player. He put him into playing only such poor characters as could gain him no reputation; and gave him for it so small a wage, that he could not so much as find himself a decent living. During all this while he had to bear all manner of privations, and hardships innumerable,—now at a loss for lodging—now for victual—and now for raiment: and yet making so little shew of the great straits to which he was so often reduced, that his true friends knew it not, unless by some accident it came to their knowledge.

This sort of life was of a monstrous difference to what his golden anticipations had made out to him. But he bore his ill-fortune with a most cheerful spirit—still sanguine as ever—believing he should yet raise for his dear children such a heritage as should enrich and ennoble them to the end of time. As soon as he found himself in some way of settlement, he wrote to John a Combe, among other things, inquiring for his offspring with all the eloquence of a fond father, and of himself, merely saying there was likelihood he should do as well as he wished: in reply to which he received a very comfortable letter, marked with the caustic sharpness the writer so much affected, yet for all that, betraying such natural goodness of heart as was customary with him. As the young player expected from his knowledge of her character, it also informed him that his wife assumed the bearing of one horribly ill-used. This intelligence brought him to reflect on the amiable sweet qualities of the accomplished Mistress D'Avenant, whose letters to him—full of feminine purity and highmindedness—now formed the chiefest pleasure his poor fortunes set at his disposal.

At twelve o' the clock he was with the rest of the company, on the stage assembled to hear the reading of a new play written by Master Lodge. The elder Burbage sat in a clair, with the MS. in his hand; his brother players, the author and divers of his friends standing about him, or getting seats where they could. The whole place looked exceeding dismal and comfortless. Below the stage, where the groundlings were wont to stand, was an old woman, busy sweeping out the [illegible] bitten apples, orange-peel and nut-shells, which had there been left. In the rooms above, were one or two other such remnants of humanity, engaged in scouring and cleaning. From one part of the stage the hammer of a carpenter was heard, noisily enough putting together the materials of a castle,—in another, a painter was brushing away in a great hurry, to make his canvas assume something of the resemblance of a deep forest—albeit it seemed the likeness did not promise to be very notable. Here was a fellow on his knees, polishing of a piece of rusty armour; and there a tailor, in his shirt-sleeves, stitching away at a torn doublet. The light came in from the open roof, very brightly; but for all that the building had a monstrous miserable sort of look with it.

It was thus situated the manager read the new play—which proved to be a singular admixture of talent and bombast—unnatural characters—extravagant scenes, and such a labyrinth of a plot nothing could be made of it: yet despite of these great blemishes, the play lacked not merit. There was force in the language and occasionally beauty—and amid heaps of confused nonsense there were a few clever touches of nature that appeared the more admirable for being so surrounded; nevertheless, the chief players condemned it, and the elder Burbage spoke more against it than any.

"I think the play would do well enough were it altered somewhat;" observed William Shakspeare.

"A good jest, I'faith!" exclaimed the manager, sarcastically, "what dost *thou* know of plays, I wonder? Marry, but 'tis like thy impudency to give an opinion on such a matter!"

"Truly, I think he knoweth as much of the matter as any of us," said Tom Greene.

"Indeed! does he?" cried old Burbage with a look of seeming great amazement; "perchance, Master Clevershakes, thou wilt *thyself* essay to make this play well enough?"

"I doubt not I could so make it;" replied the young player.

"What intolerable presumption!" exclaimed the manager. "O' my life, Will Shakspeare, so vain a person as thou art never met I in all my days. Thou art, as it were, new to the stage, and yet thou talkest of altering plays for the better, writ by one well used to such writing!"

"I beseech you, Master Manager, let him try his hand at it, if he will," said Master Lodge; "if I be not hugely mistaken, we shall have at least some sport in his alterations."

"Ay, let him have it, Burbage;" added Tom Greene; "Will must needs have a famous talent if he can mend such a play as this."

"Wilt take it in hand?" asked the manager.

"Gladly," replied young Shakspeare.

"Heaven help thee out of thy conceit!" cried old Burbage, giving him the MS. as he rose from his seat. Some of the players laughed—the authors sneered, but William Shakspeare took the despised play to his lodgings full of confidence in his own resources—and then by altering, omitting, and adding, where he thought such was most needed, he, after many days' study, made it to his mind. Certes, he was glad of such an opportunity to distinguish himself, and took marvellous pains he should do well what he had undertaken. At last he brought back the play, and it getting to be known what he had assayed, there came that day all the chiefest play-writers to have a laugh at his expense—even his old schoolfellows thought he had promised to do more than he could perform.

"I have brought you here the amended play of Master Lodge," said the young Shakspeare to the manager—offering him the MS. back again. "Perchance you will now be so good as read it in its present state."

"Nay, an' you catch me reading your foolish stuff, you are cleverer than I take you to be," replied the other, and at this the play-writers set up a loud laugh.

"Well, an' you will not do that, mayhap you will allow *my* reading it," added the young player, evidently in no way disconcerted.

"Read it or eat it—'tis all one to me," answered the manager; and again the wits had a laugh at the expense of "Master Countryman." With this permission William Shakspeare commenced reading the altered play. At first, the players were heedless, and the play-writers amused themselves by tittering at the style of the young player's reading; nevertheless, the latter read on. As soon as the alterations became evident, he had a much more attentive audience,—the players were surprised—the play-writers amazed, and the manager listened and stared, as though under an enchantment. He continued the play, the faultless delivery of which must of itself have been a sufficient treat to any one caring to hear an admirable reading: but the passages of exquisite sweet poetry—the bursts of passion, the powerful sketches of character, and the thrilling interest of the scenes which Master Lodge's play now possessed, appeared to all present something truly marvellous.

"Shall this play be played, my masters?" inquired young Shakspeare, something triumphantly by the way, as he noted the effect the perusal of it had made upon his audience.

"Played!" exclaimed Tom Greene, in a famous pleasure, "I'faith, we shall deserve to count for precious asses all our days, should we let so goodly a play escape us."

"By this light, 'tis the movingest, naturalest piece of writing I ever heard," cried young Burbage, in a like humour. His father said nothing: for he was one of those, who when they contract a prejudice against a person are exceeding slow in getting it removed; but he was too old a judge of such things not to know the nature of the performance as it stood. As for the play-writers, they looked at one another as if each was striving to exceed the other in the expression of his wonder; but as Master Lodge, seeing he could not help it, acknowledged his play had been greatly improved, they confessed it must needs be so, as the author had said it. As all the players were of one mind as to its fitness for being played, the parts were immediately given out, and a day for a first rehearsal fixed. The most envious of the play-writers then went away, consoling of themselves with the hope it might be damned.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Some men with swords may reap the field
And plant fresh laurels where they kill;
But their strong nerves at last must yield,
They tame but one another still.
Early or late
They stoop to fate
And must give up their murmuring breath
When they, pale captives, stoop to death.
SHIRLEY.

To set a lowe and kepe it sould,
Ther is no common profit sould;
But above all, natheless,
The lowe which was made for pees,
Is good to kepe for the beste;
For that sette alle men in reste
GOWER (*Confessio Amantis.*)

The villany you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction
SHAKSPEARE.

I MUST ask of the courteous reader to wend awhile with me in the company of one, of whom the historian has said something; but, as is ordinarily the case when he hath a proper object, he hath not said one half sufficient; I allude to that accomplished gentleman, and truly valiant soldier, Sir Philip Sydney. He possessed the comprehensive mind that could only be fully developed in a wide field; but, unfortunately it was contracted to suit the comparative subordinate parts he was called on to fill; and it took refuge by idling itself, in its leisure, in the fashioning of quaint conceits, that suited the age in which they were produced, but were not enough true to catch the favour of Time; besides which he possessed that truly intellectual nature which exists entirely free from the clay of human selfishness. He had no absorbing passions, that suck all into self, till the soil becometh to be a mass of abomination, that polluteth what it touches. His humanity was as different to this as is sunshine to a cloud. There was at one time some talk of his being elected to the vacant throne of Poland; but Queen Elizabeth would not have him leave her, she held him so high in her esteem. Would he had been a king! what a glorious lesson he would have set the community of crowned heads! and, in honest truth, as far as I have seen of them, they do lack infinitely some such teaching.

It hath already been said, that during the prosecution of the war in Flanders, Sir Philip was sent out as governor of Flushing, which was to the huge content of the magistrates and citizens. Here he stayed well liked of all persons, his chiefest companions being Sir

Reginald and Sir Valentine. Having by his wise rule and courteous behaviour won the love of the whole town, he set off with the two young knights to join the army. Doubtless were all three sufficiently desirous of meeting the enemy in a fair field; but the ardour of Sir Reginald and his young friend was very properly tempered with the prudence and circumspection of their more experienced associate. They at last came to the camp at Zutphen, where were assembled with the besieging forces the Earl of Leicester, as lord-lieutenant, with some of the valiantest of England's chivalry, among whom might be named the Lord Willoughby, the Lord Audley, the Earl of Essex, Sir John Norris, Sir William Stanley, and Sir William Russell; but as soon as they knew he was amongst them they thronged to do him honour, with as great shew of love and reverence as though he were the commander of them all. The Earl of Leicester presently shewed himself to be a better courtier than a general; for he did little beyond displaying his magnificence.

The siege commenced on the fifteenth of September, and wheresoever there was any fighting there were sure to be Sir Philip Sydney and his two companions. As yet, neither had received hurt; but what spare time he had Sir Philip would spend in his tent, putting his papers in order and writing his will; and by his sober discourse, showing he held himself in readiness should he fall in the coming battle. But like a careful master he took every possible opportunity of teaching his disciples a knowledge of their art. He shewed them how the entrenchments were made, explained to them the nature of the artillery, and made them familiar with the character and uses of the several fortifications. Indeed all that might be learned of the properest method of besieging a fortified town he taught them in the camp before Zutphen; and he laid it down with such clear principles that nothing could be so manifest to the understanding, as was his teaching. A famous scene was it for all young knights.

Great rows of tents spread far and wide with the panoply of war conspicuous about them, from which officers at the head of their companies issued at divers times some on foot and some on horse—some to forage for the army in the surrounding country—others to cut off the enemy's victual if any such could be found. Then came the great guns and the ammunition waggons with a strong guard for the forming of a battery—and parties of soldiers hastening to relieve those working in the trenches. Here and there would be seen the captains inspecting the different posts or hurrying to their commanders to acquaint them how matters stood. In the distance might be noticed the flames of some neighbouring village where had been some skirmish; and in another spot a detachment driving cattle and grain to the encampment—whilst afar off to the verge of the horizon, the smiling country looked as though such a thing as war was as far from them as is Hell from Heaven.

The enemy were of exceeding force in the town, numbering many thousands, composed chiefly of Spaniards and Italians, with Albanoys, both horse and foot, well equipped with all things necessary for fierce fighting; and they had made their works of a very notable strength, but they were somewhat distressed for provisions, which was well known to the besiegers, and gave them great hopes of overcoming the place. It was late one evening, about a week after the commencement of the siege, that Sir Philip Sydney and his two companions were proceeding round the lines to see that proper watch was set, and note if the enemy shewed a disposition to do them any molestation. They were afoot and not in their armour. The night was somewhat clouded, but there was in the sky many signs it would soon turn to a clear starlight: nevertheless, in the distance every thing lay in great obscurity, save at the moon's occasional escape from her shadowy canopy, when the chief features of the landscape became more conspicuous. Sir Philip was very eloquently discoursing to his young companions, concerning of the right famous battle of Azincour, when, to their somewhat astonishment, he came to a sudden break in his speech.

"What noise is that?" said he, very earnestly, as he turned his gaze towards the open country.

"I hear nought but the flowing of the waters," replied Sir Valentine.

"Nay, but this is no such sound, my friend," added Sir Philip Sydney. "Mark you those moving objects indistinctly seen in the distance, creeping rapidly along by the side of yonder hedge?"

"I do see something moving," answered the other.

"Ah, there are many figures, and if I mistake not a multitude of carriages of some sort," added Sir Reginald, gazing hard towards the spot pointed out.

"True!" exclaimed their companion, "and those figures, my friend, you may now plain enough see to be a detachment of horse, and those carriages are some hundreds of waggons, doubtless, of victual and other necessaries for the relief of this town. They must be stayed, or we are like to lose our labour. See," continued he, as he turned his piercing glance towards the besieged town, on which the moon suddenly threw its brilliance. "There are numbers of persons bustling about very busily, nigh upon the church. Of a surety they have knowledge of their friends coming, and are preparing to help their approach. Speed you, Sir Valentine, to the tent of the lord-general of the horse the Earl of Essex, and tell what you have seen, that he may have his men in readiness; and you, Sir Reginald, to the tent of the Lord Willoughby, on a like errand. I will to his excellency, the Lord Lieutenant, my honourable kinsman, where you can say I am gone; then get you to horse, and I will join you anon."

The three knights, as rapidly as they could, returned to the camp, where they immediately spread the alarm, and the trumpet's shrill alarum presently called up the sleeping soldiery; and then there was a confusion of running hither and thither, for this and for that—the grooms getting ready the horses—the knights donning their armour—the ensign-bearers running to their companies—the captains mustering their men, and the commanders hastening to the tent of the Earl of Leicester for to receive his orders, as turned the peaceful encampment that a minute or so since sounded of nought else but the measured tread or startling challenge of the guard, into a very Babel of confused noise and thronging multitudes. Sir Philip Sydney quickly wakened up his kinsman, but ere the latter was in readiness, the commanders came hastening in, desiring to be placed where they could reap the most glory; all talking—all pressing—all urgent to set out against the enemy without delay. Leaving these for awhile, I must here describe other matters that well deserve mention.

There was in the camp two notable brave gentlemen, to wit, Sir William Stanley and Sir John Norris, who a long time back had had a quarrel in Ireland, and had been at enmity ever since. It chanced so to hap Sir William was first ready with his company—some two or three hundred strong, which was of foot, and was sent to stand as a bascado, when, as he was on his way, Sir John Norris, who commanded among the horse, overtook him—being sent to the same service. Then thus spoke these enemies one to another:—

"There hath been," said Sir John, "some words of displeasure between you and me; but let it all pass,—for this day we both are employed to serve her Majesty. Let us be friends; and let us die together in her Majesty's cause." Then quoth the noble Sir William—

"If you see me not this day, by God's grace, serve my prince with a valiant and faithful courage, account me for ever a coward; and if need be I will die by you in friendship." Thereupon these brave soldiers embraced very lovingly, to the exceeding content of all present; and as soon after as might be, Sir William Stanley marched with his footmen, intending to take up a position at a church in the suburbs, but this the enemy had entrenched before hand, and there lay to the number of more than two thousand muskets and eight hundred pikes. Before he could come to skirmish with them, the Lord Audley joined him with a hundred and fifty men—in desperate haste to be in the first conflict. The fight soon began with hot vollies of musket-shot. The English pressing upon their opponents at the push of the pike, till they drove them into their hold; and then they retreated out of the range of the muskets, there to make a stand. At this the enemy issued in great strength of horse, mostly Spaniards and Italians, and at that moment there came up on the English side, the Lord-General of the Horse, the Earl of Essex, the Lord Willoughby, Sir William Russel, and Sir John Norris, and other valiant officers of a like fame, with their companies; and these presently charged the enemy with such fury, that they were, after some hard fighting, fain to retreat to their pikes leaving a famous number of dead and wounded, beside some twenty of their principal commanders who had been made prisoners.

In this charge Sir John Norris led with his wonted valour, but in discharging of his pistol it would not go off, which seeing, he stroke it at the head of his enemy and overthrew him. His associates used their lances till they broke; then plied they their curtel-axes with such vigour of arm, that the enemy took them to be more of devils than men, they were so terrible.

"For the honour of England, my fellows, follow me!" shouted the Earl of Essex as he threw his lance in rest, and wherever he saw six or seven of the enemies together, he would separate their friendship with more speed than might be in any way comfortable to them. But surely of all these valorous noble soldiers, none so behaved himself as did Sir Philip Sydney. His two companions kept close to him wherever he charged, and with lance and with curtel axe so played their parts, that each was an honour to the other. Even in the great excitement of this hot conflict, Sir Valentine thought of his humble, yet noble-hearted mistress; and inwardly resolved to do such feats for her at that time, as might any knight for the proudest lady that lived. Sir Reginald's valour also was impelled by a fair lady whom he had left in England, and loved since he had last seen the gentle Mabel; but the valour of Sir Philip was all for the honour of England. His war cry might be heard in the loudest uproar of the battle, rising amid the din of the artillery and the shouts, groans, shrieks, and cries of the wounded and the fighting.

His lance had long since been shivered, and his curtel-axe seemed to have the power of Jove's thunder-bolt, for nothing was like unto the dreadful destruction he spread around. None won so much admiration as did he, although every one appeared to be endeavouring to signalise himself above the bravest of those brave soldiers that were on his side. He charged the enemy thrice in one skirmish, spreading terror and death wherever he appeared; at last, as he was in the very fury of the conflict, he fell to the ground, shot through the leg. His fall was quickly avenged, especially by Sir Valentine and Sir Reginald; and when they had beaten back the enemy, they carefully conveyed their wounded friend to the tent of his kinsman. All his old associates were presently about him, in most anxious suspense, whilst the chirurgeon examined his wound; and when it was pronounced to be mortal, there was most doleful visages in every one present.

"O Philip, I am sorry for thy hurt!" exclaimed Leicester, as though he was deeply affected.

"O! my lord, this have I done to do your lordship and her majesty service," replied that great ornament of his age. Then came to him Sir William Russel, who kissed his hand, and said, with tears in his eyes,

"O, noble Sir Philip! there was never man attained hurt more honourably than ye have done, nor any served like unto you." And after him, others of that valiant company did testify their love and grief after much the same moving fashion; but he answered them every one very cheerfully, and seemed as though he were the only contented person in the place. As speedily as was possible he was removed from the tent, under the especial guardianship of his sorrowing disciples—the two young knights—to a neighbouring place called Arnam; and the skilfullest chirurgeons in the army were sent to him to see if any thing might be done to save one whose true greatness could be so ill spared. But it was soon seen his hours were numbered. Then the priest was sent for, that he might have proper Christian consolation in his extremity.

There lay the dying Sir Philip Sydney on a couch, supported by pillows, with one hand clasping Sir Valentine,—the other laying as affectionate hold of Sir Reginald, as they knelt beside him in great tribulation—his old companions grouped about, looking on as though their hearts would break; and even the chirurgeons, seeming by their aspects to regard their honourable patient with exceeding sympathy. He had already explained his last desires, which he had done with such singular sweetness of humour and quietness of mind, that none, when they had in their remembrance the severity of his hurt, and the extreme painfulness which must naturally come of it, could sufficiently marvel. He was now intent upon expressing his opinions on his approaching death, which he did with so much the calmness of true philosophy, that every one present appeared to listen in a perfect amazement. At this moment entered the priest. He had a venerable mild countenance, and his bearing was altogether that of a worthy minister of the Christian Church.

"Welcome, excellent sir!" exclaimed Sir Philip, with the same marvellous cheerfulness he had shown ever since he had received his deadly hurt, "I am heartily glad to see you, more especially, because, had you not come, I might never more have enjoyed the sweet comfort of your honourable society. Methinks there can be no discourse so precious as, when the soul hovereth over its mortal dwelling, pruning its wings, as it were, for its last long flight, that which cometh of a religious friend. Then is the fittingest time of all for grave counsel;—for he that is departing, is like to a knight about setting upon a journey, he scarce knoweth where, and requireth some wiser mind to advise with him, exhort him to honourable valour, and acquaint him with those infinite delectable consolations that spring from a life well spent. Surely wickedness must be very foolishness; for he that is unjust, or doeth any manner of evil, putteth away from him every hope of contentation in his extremity—he can only procure for himself a disreputable living and a miserable end; but what absolute sweet solace hath a good man when death claimeth his acquaintance! He looketh back to the bright vista of bygone years, and beholdeth so fair a landscape, it cannot help being the delight of his heart. There lie before his gaze charitable thoughts, chaste feelings, and noble achievements, blooming like flowers in Paradise, whose freshness and beauty know no fading; then when he seeketh to peer into the future, it spreadeth out for him such glorious store of starry hopes, that it seemeth as though the brightest Heavens were opening of their treasures to reward him for his desert."

"Surely, I have no need here!" cried the priest, evidently in some wondering, as he stood by the couch of the dying soldier, witnessing his extreme patience.

"O my master! my father! Alack, 'tis pitiful, most pitiful thou shouldst leave us!" exclaimed Sir Valentine, in a voice scarce audible for the greatness of his emotion.

"His last hour is come," whispered one of the chirurgeons to another; and this, the increasing paleness of his lips in some manner testified.

"Yet of all deaths for a Christian knight," continued Sir Philip, with the same marvellous composure, "Surely that is mostly to be coveted which cometh in defence of his country. To die in defending the rights of the oppressed orphan or wronged widow, is doubtless exceeding honourable; to fall whilst advancing the Christian banner against the approaches of villanous heathen Pagans, must also be a death to be envied: but the enemy of one's country must needs be the oppressor of its orphans, the wronger of its widows, and the subverter of its religion; and he who falleth in his country's defence, hath all the glory that can be gained in the combined cause of liberty and virtue. The Spaniard is the ruthless enemy of England; he seeketh her disgrace, he seeketh her dishonour: he would trample on her laws, violate her liberties, desecrate her altars, enslave, tyrannise, and bring to shame all her gallant men and admirable fair women, who could not endure his rule. Against such an enemy I have received my hurt. Surely then I ought to account myself infinitely fortunate; and you, my friends, instead of sorrowing for my loss, should rather envy me my proper ending.

"Sir Valentine, I know you to be a truly valiant knight, and a most honourable gentleman," added he, turning his eyes affectionately towards his favourite pupil; "grieve not for me, I beseech you: so much faith have I in your well disposedness and gallant qualities, I feel convinced you will do famous credit to my instructions. Believe me, I experience exquisite comfort in knowing I leave behind me a young knight of such rare promise."

"Oh, noble Sir Philip," exclaimed Sir Valentine right piteously, "O my dear master! I cannot help but grieve with all my heart; I shall never behold so worthy a commander." Then the dying soldier addressed Sir Reginald and the other officers one after another, and every one he commended for such qualities as he had taken note of; and each he exhorted to continue in the like behaviour. After this, he courteously and gravely talked with the priest on religious matters, and feeling his end drawing nigher, he asked to have his prayers. Thereupon, the good man prayed by his couch very fervently, Sir Philip joining in such devotions with a placid countenance, his lips moving, though he made no sound; and nothing else was audible in the chamber, save the half-suppressed sobs of those who could not conceal their grief. The prayer was finished, but the lips of the dying man still moved occasionally, with a sort of indistinct muttering; once only he spoke audibly, and then the words were, "For the honour of England," which plain enough told what lay next his heart; and these were the last words he was heard to utter. His eyes were rapidly getting to be more dim, and his aspect of a more deathly paleness. At last, there was a sound heard in his throat, which set every one to hiding of his face; and the bravest commander there present did groan outright.

"In my life I have seen many deaths," said the priest, a few minutes after all was over, "but never saw I the dying of so estimable a man, or so Christian a soldier!"

And thus perished, in the very flower of life, one of the noblest examples of chivalry England hath produced; but numerous as may have been her heroes, never before or since hath she set up one so truly worthy of the title. In him there seemed to be ever manifest, manhood in its brightest attributes, the noblest properties of mind, and the purest influences of feeling. His valour was divested of that animal dross which is too generally found mingled with it, in the shape of cruelty, love of strife, outrageous violence, or coarse unfeelingness; and it arose out of one motive, the honour of England, which was in his nature a very Pactolus, enriched with golden sands. Of the sterlingness of his intellect, methinks he hath left good evidence; yet it cannot in any way be compared with what might have resulted from such a source, had he lived to disencumber himself of the affectations of his age. But of his virtues, surely there cannot be such excellent witness,—for no knight ever died more lamented of the brave, the noble, the just, the true and the wise. Old and young, rich and poor, and all sexes and conditions, received the intelligence of his decease with the deepest grief. Few men have been so loved—none so sore lamented. But from a scene so instructive as the death of so great a man, I must now hurry the reader to one, which, mayhap, hath also its lesson, though never could difference be so complete, as shall be found in their chief features. It is necessary to say, that the event about to be related followed upon the foregoing, after some lapse of time.

The noble, of whom the reader hath already some knowledge, through his base attempts on the poor foundling, sat with his ordinary companion in iniquity, the gallant before described, in a chamber, which, for the sumptuousness of its furnishing, might justly be styled regal. He no longer seemed as though he sought concealment, being attired in such gorgeousness as language can give but a faint idea of; his countenance full of confidence, ever and anon brightened with a social sort of smile, as he listened to his dependant. The latter looked more the worn out profligate than ever; but he was more bravely clad than was his wont; and appeared as though his infamous services earned him liberal wages. In what he spoke there was the triumphant villain, rejoicing in the success of some foul scheme just brought to a foul conclusion—with a manner half laughing, half sneering, in relation to the subject, yet as regarded his hearer, marked with a mingled assurance and security that sufficiently bespoke the nature of his service, and his dependance on his employer.

The table before them contained vessels of wine, with silver cups, and dishes of gold filled with dried fruit, cakes, conserves, and other delicates, as if they had been making good cheer. The chamber was of such dimensions and of so fair a structure, as made it evident it appertained to some princely castle, and the battlements and towers seen from the windows appeared as strong witnesses to the same purpose. The noble sat on a richly embroidered chair, in great state, resting of his feet on a cushion of costly stuff, beside the table, carelessly using of a diamond-hafted toothpick; and the gallant sat over against him on as proud a seat, telling the staple of his discourse, and making the whilst as famous cheer as he could.

"'Twas well done, if no suspicion follow it, Sir Piers," observed the former, as if musing somewhat.

"Nay, suspicion is clean impossible, my lord," replied the other. "The man is dead, and I defy the searchingest pryers to discover how he came by his death. As for me, my disguise was so perfect, none could suspect who I was, and even could that be possible—believing me as I affected to be your bitter enemy, they would as lief suspect themselves of the deed as your honourable lordship."

"Did he make no outcry," inquired the noble.

"Not a whisper!" replied the gallant.

"Was there no fierce convulsion?" asked the former.

"Scarce a struggle!" answered his companion.

"The poison is the most subtle I ever heard of. It seemed to have entered into his very marrow, ere you could say he had well taken it, and left the face unmarked by any blackening, or disfigurement, like one who dieth of a sudden, without apparent disease. Truly, 'tis a notable ridder of enemies. I knew not so invaluable a mixture could be had any where."

"I had it of an Italian woman who was reputed the skilfulest compounder of such things that ever lived," said his lord carelessly. "But this is not the first trial I have made of it. Thou hast managed the affair most cleverly I must confess. I would thou hadst succeeded as well in procuring me the beauteous Mabel."

"O' my life, my lord, I did all that most extreme cunning could accomplish," replied his dependant very earnestly. "Some pestilent thing or another ever thwarted me when I thought myself to be securest; and her long illness came, a murrain on't! when I believed the devil himself could not have snatched her from my net."

"'Tis strange, Sir Piers, thou shouldst never have heard aught of her since," observed the noble.

"Nay, who could have supposed the wench would have given me the slip when the physicians said she was scarce able to leave her chamber," replied the gallant. "I have searched for her since then far and near, and my man hath penetrated into all sorts of places the whole country round, where it was supposed she might have got shelter, but not so much as a glimpse of her have either of us gained."

"She was a noble creature!" exclaimed his companion. "I have seen nought to compare with her either amongst our court beauties here in England, or the lovely dames I met during my stay abroad. I never have been so monstrously disappointed as in her escape. I would have given thousands to have prevented it."

"By this hand I was never so vexed all my days!" added the other with similar earnestness. After this there was a pause of a minute or so, in which the former seemed thinking of his loss, whilst the other replenished the cups with wine, and helped himself freely to the tempting cates before him.

"Does that follower of thine know anything of what thou hast lately done for me," inquired the noble.

"Not a syllable," replied the gallant. "He is faithful enough I doubt not, but I would trust none in so dangerous a matter."

"Dost think he hath any suspicion of it?"

"Not the slightest."

"Nor any of the menial people about me?"

"'Tis utterly impossible, my lord, I have been so close."

"'Tis well," exclaimed the noble. "Thou hast managed this matter very delicately, Sir Piers. Thou hast proved thyself a true friend withal, and I assure thee I will reward thee fittingly."

"I thank you, my lord," replied his associate. "You have already bestowed on me many marks of your honourable favour, and methinks I cannot do enough to show my readiness to serve so bountiful a master."

"Depend on't what I have done is nought to what I intend doing," answered the other. "Thy knighthood is but a small honour to what I can now gain for thee. I am paramount in the council, and with her highness I have so fixed myself, I can do as I will. Go get thee, good Sir Piers, to my privy chamber—there is my George-collar I would have out of the jewel-case on the dressing-table. Bring it me straight, I prythee, and tell my grooms not to come to me unless I send to them."

"Readily, my lord," answered Sir Piers, and taking the key of the jewel-case from his patron, the newly made knight—surely never was knighthood so dishonoured—proceeded out of the chamber. Directly the door closed on him, the noble sprung from his seat, and very carefully took a small paper packet from beneath the silken lining of his velvet doublet, and cautiously opening it, poured its contents into the silver cup of his dependant, and then briskly stirred up the wine with his jewelled dagger. The latter he first wiped on his handkerchief, and replaced in its sheath; and then sauntered to the window, gaily humming of a popular tune. Sir Piers presently returned with what he had been sent for, and took it to the table, and his lord remained a minute or so at the window, as if intent on noting something in the base-court that had attracted his attention, and then sauntered back to his seat humming of his tune with the same careless manner as he had commenced it.

"You are merry, my lord!" exclaimed the knight, who had now regained his seat.

"Merry! ay, and why not, my friend?" replied the other very socially, as he put round his neck the magnificent chain he had sent for. "Methinks, I have right famous cause, Sir Piers. Every thing conspireth to make me the greatest man in these realms. I have no peer look, where I will; and I have borne myself hitherto with such marvellous prudence, none can urge against me aught to my prejudice."

"Marry, then you have famous cause for singing," cried his dependant.

"Truly, have I, my faithful worthy friend," said his companion, taking the wine cup in his hand, with the look and manner of a true reveller. "Come, Sir Piers, prythee pledge me. As thou shalt share my fortunes, 'tis but fitting thou shouldst drink to my lasting prosperity."

"Most gladly will I," answered Sir Piers, quickly rising from his seat, and following his lord's example in grasping his wine cup.

"Now, mark me, and do thou likewise—or I will proclaim thee a sorry drinker;" and thereupon the noble drunk off at a draught the contents of his cup.

"Bravely done, my lord!" cried the other, very merrily; "And I will now shew how apt a scholar I am. My lord, I drink to your continual prosperousness." And then Sir Piers finished his draught in as rapid a fashion as his lord had done.

"Thou art indeed an apt scholar!" replied the noble, manifestly with more than ordinary satisfaction, as he placed his empty cup on the table, and reseated himself—the knight at the same time doing the like thing; and then the former commenced humming of his tune again, and using of his toothpick, with as careless a look as if no person could be so content as was he. Sir Piers poured out more wine for himself, and continued eating of the dried fruit. All at once he smiled somewhat, and just at that moment his patron, taking a sudden glance at him, noticed it.

"Ha, are thy thoughts so pleasant, Sir Piers?" cried the other, and then went on humming of his tune.

"Exceeding pleasant, my lord," said his companion, and smiled more evidently than before. At this the noble looked at him very hard, saying never a word; and the knight kept his eyes on those of his employer as if he cared not for such scrutiny, for his smile continued to become more palpable. The lord now looked surprised—then amazed—then distrustful—his tune ceased ere it had half ended—the toothpick fell from his hand, and laying convulsive hold of the arms of his chair, he leaned forward, fixing a stare of horror on his companion. The smile of the latter now had sort of devilish derision in it, and his eyes glared on the other with a very fiendlike mockery. The noble now snatched at his dagger, holding himself up with the strength of the other arm, whilst the agony expressed in his face, whence the blood had all rushed, leaving it of a deadly paleness, and the strange manner in which he began twisting his body, bespoke in him some terrible suffering; but at this his companion laughed outright.

"Caught in thine own trap!" cried his triumphant partner in guilt. "O' my life, never was traitor so well served! What? After I had done at thy bidding all manner of villanies, a dog's death was to be my reward; and so thou get rid of every evidence of thy matchless infamy! Prythee, my lord, stop up thy key-hole whilst preparing to poison thy familiars, when thou hast sent them out of the way awhile, else they may do as I have done, spy thy intention, and on their return make so bold as change the drugged cup for another, and so the poisoner get the poison for himself."

Here the knight laughed again more scornfully than before. At this, his lord made a convulsive effort to rise—his horrible fierce looks distorted as if with the most racking intolerable pains—his eyes seeming to dilate to a wonderful bigness, and flashing forth most dreadful deadly malice—his teeth gnashing together, and his every limb startling and trembling with the mightiness of his agony; but as soon as he had got himself to stand upright, his eyes rolled in their sockets most frightfully; violent fierce spasms and convulsions shook him in every part—the uplifted dagger dropped from his nerveless grasp, and the next moment its lordly owner fell to the ground a corpse.

"So ends my Lord of Leicester!" exclaimed his villanous associate, as he approached the body. "Truly, a very suitable ending. But it will scarce be proper to leave him here, else I may chance to follow him more quickly than I desire." Saying this, Sir Piers carefully placed the dead man leaning back in his seat as if he slept, and then hurried out of the chamber. Thus finished his career the most accomplished villain of his age, who was so admirable a master of duplicity, that his real character was suspected of but few; and so cautious in the doing of his villanies, that he rarely left the slightest ground for suspicion. At last, his over-anxiety to secure himself ended in his own destruction, as hath been related. Nevertheless, few knew him to be what he was; and by those few he was so thoroughly detested for his extraordinary craft and treachery, that amongst them he was usually called by the nick-name of "The Gypsey." By the majority he hath been held in remembrance as "The Great Earl of Leicester;" but his title to such greatness as they would confer on him, was grounded on his magnificence, his unrivalled power in the kingdom, and the consummate policy of his endeavours to retain it. He was a brilliant character, but it was the brilliance that cometh of a base metal, where the art used to give it a shining appearance out of all comparison exceedeth the value of the stuff on which it is exerted.

Many such men there are, who, by their high position in the social fabric and wondrous subtlety in outwardly conforming with established opinions, pass for monuments worthy of admiration and reverence; whilst divers of the truly great, who have no other title than honesty, and little wealth beyond their daily crust, are passed over as of no account, and all that cometh of their noble aims as far as the world is concerned—is the oblivion of an unhonoured grave. Nevertheless, be sure Nature taketh a proper heed of these last, and whenever that vile partial chronicler, History, braggeth most loudly of his proud lords and sanguinary conquerors, she whispers in the ears of all just men, the loving-kindnesses, the generous self-denials, the true nobility, and imperishable worth of her own peerage. Thus, among the well-judging few, models of true greatness are ever to be found worthy of close copying, which, age after age, lead to the production of others of a like merit; and thus nature fulfilleth the mission of truth, and laugheth the mere brags of history to utter and everlasting scorn.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Behaviour, what wert thou,
Till this man showed thee? and what art thou now?

SHAKSPEARE.

These are the arks, the trophies I erect,
That fortify thy name against old age;
And these thy sacred virtues must protect
Against the dark, and Time's consuming rage;
Though the error of my youth they may discover
Suffice they shew—I lived and was thy lover.

DANIEL.

Love that looks still on your eyes,
Though the winter have begun
To benumb our arteries,
Shall not want the summer's sun
Love, that still may see your cheeks,
Where all rareness still reposes,
Is a fool, if e'er he seeks
Other lilies, other roses.

BROWNE.

WILLIAM SHAKSPEARE sat in a miserable garret which boasted of no better furniture than an old table, on which were some books and papers, an old stool to match, whereon he was sitting, a truckle bed of a like humbleness, that served for his nightly rest; and a worm-eaten chest that played the part of cupboard, of press, and of book-case also. The casement was small and dirty, and the wainscot and ceiling crumbling in many places. I said amiss when I asserted there was no better furniture in the chamber, for there was in it its gifted tenant; and this made the poor place to be more richly furnished than could have been the stateliest hall throughout the Kingdom. Mayhap he was studying of a part in some play, for he sat leaning his arms on the table, with his hands supporting his head immediately over a written paper; and so serious was he in this studying, that he heard not the opening of the door, and the entrance of a visitor.

"Ha! there thou art, by this hand!" exclaimed Master Greene, the play-writer, with as much seeming gladness as though the young player was his dearest friend; and thereupon he went hastily up to him, and shook him famously by the hand, inquired after his health, and making such bountiful show of friendship as was quite refreshing to see. Master Shakspeare was courteous as was his wont; but still he could not help marvelling what brought his visitor to him, for they never had been on any notable intimacy. After a while, Master Greene sat himself on the end of the bed, for he would not accept of the stool, though it was pressed on him with some urgency. Then he talked of the Queen of Scots' execution, and the last conspiracy of the papists, and other matters of news, as glibly as an intelligencer; to which the other listened with the utmost civilness, joining in the discourse when it seemed necessary, yet wondering exceedingly such a person should put himself to the trouble of calling on him merely to talk to him on subjects with which every one was familiar. At last, the conversation gradually approached the subject of plays.

"That play of Lodge's went bravely," said he; "but I said it must needs succeed when I heard it read by you. Surely you must have made marvellous alterations. I detected them on the instant. I did, by this hand! Indeed they were filled with such exquisite beauty, it was clean impossible they should pass for the invention of Lodge, who, between ourselves, is exceeding shallow—a sorry scribbler, who hath written nought deserving of serious commendation."

"Nay, Master Lodge is not without merit," replied his companion.

"Merit he hath, it may be allowed," responded the other; "but be assured 'tis monstrous little. He could never write a play of any judgment, believe me. Mere bombast for passion, dullness for wit; and by way of dialogue, the most tedious poor stuff that ever was writ. A knowledge of this made me the more admire your wondrous excellent genius in fashioning so admirable fine a play out of such sorry materials."

"I did as well as my poor ability would allow," observed the young player. "But for mine own part, I think not so highly of it. I trust I may live to do much better things."

"Ay, that shall you, Master Shakspeare!" exclaimed Master Greene, very earnestly. "And I will do all that in my power lieth to put you in the way of attaining the excellence you desire."

"I am much beholden to you, good sir," said William Shakspeare.

"Not at all, not at all—O' my life! my sweet friend!" cried the play-writer; "it is your merit commands it. I am right glad and happy to be of service to so estimable a gentleman. By the way, I prophecied from the moment I noted your first appearance on the stage, you would, ere long, distinguish yourself famously. I saw it in you; I did by this hand." Now, considering that the speaker was one of the bitterest of those who spoke so slightingly of the young player at the tapster's, it was somewhat bold of him, and impudent withal, to venture such an assertion as this last; but his companion was not of a nature to treasure up slights, and he took what was told him as truly genuine kindness.

"It is scarce fitting of me to speak of my own works," continued Master Greene, in some manner that was meant to be hugely modest, "Methinks they should speak for themselves. There is my play of 'The History of Orlando Furioso,' which, as it hath taken so well of all judges, leaveth me nought to say of it. There is another of mine, 'A Looking-Glass for London and England,' the popularity of which is even greater than the preceding. Again, there is 'The honourable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay,' that hath been no less praised; and also, 'The Comical History of Alphonsus, King of Arragon,' held in similar great liking: but surely my plays must be familiar enough to you, they having had such marvellous success."

"In most of them I have played," replied the other; "and as far as I could judge, they were amazingly relished of the audience."

"Indeed, I have no reason to be dissatisfied with my writings," added his companion; "therefore, it seemeth to me that I should be an exceeding proper person to give you assistance in any such performances, design you, as you should, to essay further efforts at the writing of plays."

William Shakspeare remembered, that Master Greene was of some note for his learning, having taken degrees at both Oxford and Cambridge: and, being an experienced play-writer, seemed a very fit person to give instructions in whatever he might be deficient.

"Truly I shall be glad of your friendly advice, worthy sir," replied he; "and I thank you very heartily for being so kindly disposed towards me."

"Believe me, it all cometh of my love of your extreme worthiness, Master Shakspeare!" exclaimed the other, with a seeming wonderful sincerity. "O' my life, I would do anything within my compass for your advantage; and this affectionateness leadeth me now to offer to write a play with you as speedily as may be most to your liking, after the manner usual in such cases; that is to say, you shall write such a part of it, and I will write another part of it, on a design before hand approved of us both."

"I care not how soon we set about it, Master Greene," answered his companion very readily.

"Then meet me at Paul's, after the play is over to-day, and we will talk the matter more at length," said the play-writer, rising to take his leave, with an aspect of considerable satisfaction. "But one thing before I leave you, my dear sweet friend—on no account mention what we are about doing to Kit Marlowe, or any other writer of plays. Between ourselves, Kit is a horrible slippery sort of person, a desperate coney-catcher; and his companions Lodge, Peele and Nash, are no better than he. You will do well in having nought to do with such."

The young player promised to say nothing of the matter; and soon after, with an abundance of friendliness, the visitor took his leave. He had not been gone many minutes, when a quick step was heard ascending the stairs, and presently in came Kit Marlowe, apparently in an exquisite good humour, full of boisterous greeting, and laughing and talking as though his young host and he had been boon companions a thousand years. He too sat himself at the bed's foot, and after the first great gladness of meeting was over, talked very freely all manner of gossip, intermixed with jests, or such as were intended to pass for such, and a continual accompaniment of laughing, which proved at least, he could relish his own wit. He too, after a fit interval, led the discourse almost imperceptibly to plays, and when he got fairly hold of Master Lodge's production, he broke out into such praises of the amendments, as far exceeded what Master Greene had said.

"As for Lodge, I marvel he should attempt play-writing," added he; "there is more wit in a sour hedge-crab, than in all he hath done, which sheweth what sweet grafting he must have had, to have produced such goodly fruit as the last. Indeed, it hath a most luscious flavour; as different to that of the old stock as is honey to verjuice. But 'tis natural enough, that whatsoever forceth one to make a wry face, as have I scores of times, I warrant you, at Lodge's poor performances, must needs be of manifest unripeness."

"Surely, you hardly do him justice, Master Marlowe?" observed the young player.

"Justice, quotha!" exclaimed his companion, with a loud laugh; "by this light, had he justice, he would be badly off indeed. Nay, nay, Master Shakspeare, he is as barren as a whipping post; therefore am I better able to acknowledge the merit which is your due in altering of his play. You have transmuted his baseness into a most sterling commodity. But you must not rest here, my friend; you are let slip, and you must forward now like a true hound."

"Be assured, I would not throw away an opportunity for advancing myself, came it in my way," said William Shakspeare.

"I'faith, you would be notably to blame, were you to do so," added the other. "Now, you know I have written some few trifles; for instance, there is my 'Tamburlaine the Great;' there is my 'Doctor Faustus;' there is my 'Jew of Malta;' there is my 'Massacre of Paris;' and there are also one or two other similar affairs of my unworthy enditing; I think but poorly of them—but it hath pleased his worship the World to have a different opinion. Mayhap, his worship is an ass; but trust me, I will not quarrel with him, whilst he beareth me on his back as bravely as he doth. Nevertheless, be my plays well or ill, they take, which methinks is the main point; and it sheweth I have some sort of skilfulness in knowing what will please."

"Doubtless," replied his companion.

"Now, my dear sweet friend," continued the other very cordially, "it is evident you are possessed of a like quality, else could not Lodge's play have the success it hath met with: therefore I have devised a plan, by which we may both profit exceedingly, and hold the field against all comers."

"Indeed!" exclaimed William Shakspeare, in some sort of surprise.

"Ay, my dear rogue, and this is my plan," replied Kit Marlowe; "we two will club our wits and write a play in conjunction. I will bring forth what gifts I have that have so long been wont to please the public, and you shall add to them the same inimitable choice talent you have already shewn in your first efforts; and the result cannot help being such a play as the world hath never yet seen, and which shall at once place us far above the paltry bombastic scribblers who now thrust their worthless inventions on the stage. What sayest, Master Shakspeare? How dost affect this plan of mine, my sweet friend?"

"In honest truth I like it well enough, Master Marlowe," replied his companion, holding in mind the other's reputation as a writer of plays, which at that time stood second to none. "If you think it will be attended with such famous results, we will commence it as soon as you please."

"Well said, my heart of oak!" cried the other, now rising with a notable pleased countenance. "I will call on you this time to-morrow to confer further on the matter. But I charge you, break not a word of it to Greene, or Peele, or Nash, or any of that set; and have no dealings with them on any account. There is neither conscience, truth, nor honesty in them. They are cozeners all; and that Greene, he is the very blackest sheep of the flock. Keep aloof from them, I beseech you, else you will suffer for it terribly; and I promise you, if you will allow of my true friendship, I will, ere any very long time hath passed, put you in such good case, you shall consider fortune and yourself are sworn brothers." So saying, and with as prodigal a shew of affectionateness as Master Greene had exhibited in his leave taking, Kit Marlowe also departed.

The young player marvelled somewhat that persons of such reputation as were his two visitors, should come to one so obscure as himself on such an errand; but he thought there might be advancement for him in availing himself of their offers, and therefore very gladly accepted them. Their abuse of each other, and of their companions, amused him, for he saw thoroughly into it. Whilst he was engaged in reflections upon these visits, another step on the stairs betokened another visitor, and in came Peele. He went through much the same sort of scene as his predecessors, exhibited the like extravagant joy at meeting—gossipped about similar indifferent subjects, till he skilfully led the converse to plays—abused Lodge as heartily as the others had done, and spoke with the same liberality of commendation on the amendments of William Shakspeare, proposed to write a play conjointly with the young player—and after warning him against his brother play-writers, more especially against Greene and Marlowe as notorious bad characters, he took his leave. He was followed by Chettle, Kyd, Nash, and others of the playwriters, all of whom, in much the same sort of routine, either offered to write plays with him, or brought him plays they had already writ, to do as he liked by, or some they had commenced, to get him to finish as it pleased him best. And every one—albeit, forgetful how greatly they had previously abused him, came in such fashion as seemed most to approve their extraordinary love of him; and none departed without denouncing all of his companions, who had gone before, or were like to come after.

The young player answered them as well as he could—monstrously amused at the whole affair, for he had wit enough to see what they aimed at; but resolved, as far as he could, to make them subservient to his own particular advancement. In this methinks he shewed his wisdom; for as affairs stood, it was not at all possible for him to make way either as a player, or a play-writer without some such assistance. The manager was as inveterate against him as ever, because the success of the piece William Shakspeare had taken in hand, convicted him in the eyes of his associates of possessing a marvellous lack of judgment. He could plain enough see the great merit of the alterations, but his wounded self-love now made his prejudices all the stronger, and he seemed for it only the more disposed to keep the young player's talent as much in the back-ground as he could. This unworthy treatment the latter bore with wonderful sweet patience and dignity; nevertheless it fretted his high aspiring mind exceedingly at times, and the bitter poverty in which it kept him, exposed him to such humiliations and sufferings as were scarce endurable.

His chiefest pleasures lay in hearing of his children, which he never failed to do with a famous regularity, by the kind assistance of John a Combe; and in the continuance of his correspondence with the lovely Mistress D'Avenant, who more and more developed to his quick perceptions the prodigal gifts of mind and heart of which she was possessed. It is to be expected that their correspondence should be marked with a tone of more endearing earnestness as they made more familiar acquaintance with each other's manifold loving virtues. This insensibly took place as their intimacy proceeded. The language of passionate devotion mingled in greater portion with graver discourse. Intellect came warmed with a more endearing philosophy, and sympathy took on itself sweeter and deeper feeling. This change was first evident in Mistress d'Avenant, and indeed it continued most conspicuous in her correspondence. It seemed as though she could set no bounds to her affection for one of so truly loving a nature, and that it would scarce be justice if her admiration of his genius came not to the utmost extravagance of idolatry. Never did any woman shew a more generous self-abandonment upon the altar of true devotion; but in this, as she imagined no ill, she believed no ill could exist. She felt herself ennobled by her feelings, and thought she could not sufficiently testify her gratitude to the honourable source whence they sprung.

Her frequent writing was of essential service, for she never failed to hold out to him the most brilliant hopes. Nothing seemed she to love so much as the picturing of his future greatness; and her appreciation of his worth was such, that these anticipations were beyond all things magnificent. She piled up a very pyramid of hopes to his honour, which she fondly believed should last unto eternity. This not only fired his ambition, but kept the flame burning with an increasing brightness—but it did more—the high opinion of his desert, which it evinced, awakened and kept alive in him a deep continual anxiousness to make his conduct accord with it as much as was possible. Perchance this occasioned that marvellous sweet patience he exhibited under the petty tyranny of the elder Burbage, and that freedom from every sort of discreditableness shewn by him whilst suffering the fiercest pressure of poverty. It is here necessary to add that in his frequent letters to his affectionate sweet friend at Oxford he gave no intimation of the poorness of his estate, so that she was in complete ignorance of his sufferings and privations. This arose partly from a certain delicacy which kept him from acquainting her with such matters; and in some measure, from a peculiar pride which allowed him not to betray the immense difference of his case betwixt what she desired and what he endured. But to give the reader a proper understanding of her character, methinks it will be necessary to introduce here some specimen of the style and matter of her writing. Here followeth an extract from one of her letters:—

"Let me beseech of you to take sufficient heed of yourself, so that no hurt follow those deep studies to which, you tell me, you give all your leisure. Remember that this constant wear and tear of the mind is infinitely destructive of the body. I am fearful your extreme ardour to fulfil your glorious destiny may bring you to a halt ere half the journey hath been accomplished. Think of this. I pray you essay to curb in your impetuous spirits. He who would win a race starteth not off at the top of his strength, whereby he might soon spend his energies; but beginneth at a fair pace, which he can keep up without fear of exhaustion, and mayhap increase where there shall appear need of it. Ever bear in mind the greatness of the prize for which you are running; and never part with the conviction that it cannot help being yours, use you but common prudence in its attainment. I often find myself wishing I were with you, that I might see your health suffered nothing by your studiousness. I doubt not I should keep such excellent watch for your safety as should be an example to all vigilant officers: and surely this is the more fitting of me, knowing as I do, above all others, the exceeding covetable preciousness of such a charge.

"But as with you I cannot be, I hope you will allow of my desires exerting their salutary influence as my poor thoughts express them in this present writing. To live to see you so proudly circumstanced as your merit gives you fairest title to, is what I most fervently hope for. This, as it seemeth to me, can only be marred by your own want of proper care of yourself; and having marked how marvellous little of the selfish principle exists in your disposition, I cannot help, at times, dreading the consequence. Pardon me my importunity—I must again beseech you to be heedful. Let me at least have the exquisite consolation of knowing that my life hath been for some good purpose; for should it be my ill hap to behold you, from want of proper guardianship, fall short of my expectations, I should from that moment consider, and with strict justice, my existence to have been a blank. But what I am, or may be, must be of little moment in so important a matter. I would rather you should keep in mind the thousands and tens of thousands to whose delight your brilliant destiny calleth you to minister. In brief, do for yourself as I desire of you; and all people, all times, and all countries shall look to you as their chief debtor.

"I believe the amount of human happiness to be none so large in comparison with the countless numbers that would draw upon it: and look upon such persons as yourself—Ah! where shall I find me such another!—as keepers of banks who are wont to issue their own coinage for to be circulated generally—to the vast increase of comfort in the whole community. Having this office, never forget for one single moment how great is your responsibility. Should any accident happen to prevent the proper fulfilment of your services, how much will the world lose of what is most sterling and necessary. Perchance for lack of such, all manner of baseness may be made to pass for the true coinage, and poverty become more general by reason of the spreading of such worthless counterfeits. I conjure you to be regardful in this point. Meet you with disappointments or mishaps, look on them as the natural lets of life, and pass them by with the proper indifferency that should belong to one of a philosophic mind. Envy you may meet with—slander you may meet with—which with injustice, insolence, and oppression mayhap will seek to stop your way—for these are the common obstacles to greatness in its early development; but of such,—I am so conversant with your character,—I know you will make of them mere straws that shall not hinder you a step. It is of yourself I fear. No one else can prove himself your real enemy. Take care then of yourself. Watch yourself narrowly. Strengthen yourself by all possible means; and by so doing, marvel not that you weaken the power of yourself to do your fortunes injury.

"I expect you to bear with me for my so constant repetition of this my request. My zeal will not allow of my stopping short in endeavours so paramount for the securing of your welfare. You are to me all wisdom, virtue, and excellence—all nobleness, all honour, all truth, charity, and love. In the spirit of the devout worshippers of old, I am not content with the conviction that the temple at which I pay my devotions is the worthiest in the whole world; I would lay such liberal offerings on the altar as should go far to make it so. I devote all my acquirements to its use—such treasures as I have in my thoughts, feelings, hopes, blessings, and prayers, I give as jewels to enrich so admirable a shrine—and all I dare desire for myself for so doing, is, that when the edifice hath attained its deserved celebrity,—and far and near come throngs of earnest worshippers,—in the innermost sanctuary there should be one little nook concealed from the vulgar eye, wherein should be entombed the heart of her whose deep affections helped to secure its fame."

On a nature like that of William Shakspeare, it was not possible for such an intimacy so conducted, to exist without producing the best effect. There could not be a more different person than was he at this time to what he had been the first two years of his marriage. He was proud of being loved by so noble a woman. He felt there was in it an honour, which for real value the objects of his highest ambition could not exceed; and this raised him so far above the lowness of his condition that he was enabled to endure it as well as he did. It so happened that his last letter remained unanswered a long while, which made him write again; but he heard not of her any the more, which filled him with some uneasiness, for she was ordinarily most punctual in her writing. Not knowing whether his letters had miscarried, or that she had been taken with any sudden illness, he felt in some way perplexed as to what would be best for him to do. On the morning that the play-writers had shewn towards him such exceeding friendliness, after he had gott rid of the last some half hour or so, and believed he should have no more such visits, he heard another footstep which put him into no little discontent, for he was tired of such company. Nevertheless, seeing he could not well do otherwise, he resigned himself to his fate, and when a knock was heard at his door, bade his new visitor enter. Thereupon the door opened, and to his exceeding wonder, who should appear at it but Mistress D'Avenant, and to his greater astonishment she was attired in the ordinary mourning of a widow.

The sort of greeting may be imagined between two such persons under such circumstances; but still there was something in it not likely to be conceived of any. It appeared that John D'Avenant had been attacked with a fierce disease, and all the time it lasted his wife attended him so closely day and night, she had not a moment to spare for any other purpose. It is true he had been anything rather than a proper husband to her; and his own unworthiness had brought him to his present condition; but in her eyes these facts could be no bar to her shewing of him in his extremity the proper duties of a wife: whereof the consequence was her unremitting kind nursing of him to the very moment of his death, so exhausted her, that she was fain to keep her bed for some weeks after. On her recovery she thought, instead of writing to the young player, she would be herself the bearer of the intelligence, and thereupon proceeded to London. At the play-house where she had been used to direct her letters, she learned his address, and not long after that she arrived at his lodgings. Perchance, this behaviour of hers may be thought monstrous irregular by many; but as she sought no evil, she took in no sort of consideration any one's opinion on the matter. In their meeting there seemed a mutual constraint—in her it seemed to arise from the overpowering influence of her feelings—in him it was the result of an embarrassing idea, that at once and for the first time presented itself to his mind.

During his stay at Oxford he had never alluded to his own marriage, perchance as much from dislike of the subject as from imagining such allusion to be unnecessary; and in his after correspondence the feeling which prevented him troubling her with his own particular griefs, kept him silent on the matter. Thus, his youth and his general conduct might, he thought, have impressed her with the belief than he was unmarried, and his ardent affection for her, which he had made too conspicuous to be mistaken, might now have brought her to London with the conviction he would immediately make her his wife. There is no doubt nothing would have given him such true pleasure as the fulfilling of such expectations, had he the power of so doing, but knowing its utter impossibility, and the terrible disappointment the knowledge of it might create in a confiding loving woman, he was for some minutes perfectly bewildered as to what he should do for the best. However, being well convinced that to delay making her acquainted with his real situation, would but increase the likelihood of evil, he determined to break it to her as gently as he could without loss of time. Thereupon he took occasion, as they conversed together, to speak of his children, doing it in such a manner as might gradually prepare her for the knowledge of his marriage; after which he informed her of the circumstances under which it had taken place, and without imputing blame to any save himself, gave her such insight into its unhappiness, as he thought necessary.

Perchance Mistress D'Avenant had entertained some notion of being made his wife, as she could not but be aware how dear she was to him, for on her perceiving the purport of his converse, her beautiful countenance suddenly took on it the paleness of death. There was a fixed unmeaning stare in her brilliant eyes, and a sort of quick swallowing at her throat; but these signs passed almost on the instant they made their appearance, and she presently listened to his unexpected intelligence with scarce more than an ordinary interest. Doubtless the disappointment had been poignant enough; but she was of too noble a disposition to betray her real feelings, seeing it could only contribute to her lover's unhappiness; and heard him out without interruption.

"'Tis marvellous our fortunes should have been so much alike," observed she. "Like you I married too young to know what I was preparing for myself, and in perfect ignorance of the nature of the person to whom I was united. Like you I have been deceived by fair appearances, and after the discovery of the huge mistake I had made, lived a life of hopes overthrown, and cares which every day made less endurable. When I became honoured with your acquaintance, a new light shone on my path. I felt I could endure a martyrdom but to seem worthy in your eyes. Although I quickly loved you with my every feeling, from the moment I coveted your affection I bent my mind and my heart so to my duties as a wife, that the most exacting husband could have found in me no manner of fault—for I had in me the conviction, that one who was amiss as a wife, must needs be unworthy as a woman, and that such a woman had no shadow of title to the sympathy of a disposition so allied to excellence as your own."

The young player replied not to this: save only as he sat by her side, the hand he had held in his own, he fondly raised to his lips. She continued:—

"When I learned I was loved by you, it gave me a value in mine own eyes I knew not till then. It appeared as though I had attained the very noblest and most glorious dignity a woman could possess. How liberally you garnished my poor state with the wondrous magnificence of your genius, I have not power enough of language to state; but, on every fresh occasion, you bound my nature to you with a chain more precious than gold, and more durable than adamant. Believe me I am grateful; but I despair of ever being grateful enough. In the after time, when I hear—as hear I must—the universal voice breathing your immortal praises over the land, methinks I cannot help being the proudest creature on the earth, for I can feed my heart with the exquisite sweet truth that I, a humble creature of no worldly rank or quality whatsoever, was singled out, esteemed, and loved of so truly honourable a person."

"Ay, dearest, truest, and best of all women!" exclaimed her lover as he rapturously pressed her to his breast. "But there is a truth that methinks would be still more satisfactory to you at such a time, and that is—your desert alone made me enamoured, and by the proper influence of the same admirable cause, I continued in the same fond feeling. Think you I have no call for gratitude? Surely I have far more need to shew it than yourself. I doubt not at all, had it not been my inestimable good fortune to have found myself at such a time supported by your encouraging and ennobling hopes, I should have sunk under the harrassing vexatious toils and troubles which met me at every turn. Truly I am wondrously indebted to you, never was service so great as that which you have done me; and if ever I should rise to that lofty summit your affections have declared accessible, believe me I shall attribute—in nought but strict justice—the whole honour of it to her whose bountiful sweet goodness brought it within my compass. At present I have nought better to offer as proof of the grateful sense I entertain of your most prodigal kindness, save the imperishable feelings it hath awakened. All of me which I believe to be worthy of commendation—every proper thought—every excellent sympathy—each sensation, impulse and sentiment that most deserves entertainment, do declare my love of you. If such love content you well, count on it for the lasting of my life. I am yours, and if, as you have afforded me such indisputable evidence, I may claim a loving property in your affections, I beseech you very earnestly, continue me in the inexpressible delicious comfort of believing you are mine."

"Ah, Master Shakspeare, methinks I lack not readiness to do that," exclaimed Mistress d'Avenant with marvellous impressive tenderness,—"That I should be greatly condemned for my conduct is more than probable, but such condemnation frighteth not me. It seemeth that my loving you is necessary to your happiness, and that your happiness cannot help but produce a very cornucopia of delights unto the many thousands that may come within your influence. The conviction of the universal good I may effect, maketh my love to know no bounds. I ask nothing—I wish for nothing but the enviable office of driving all discomforts from your neighbourhood, and so securing for you a gladdening existence. That my merit is so little I regret, but if you hold me in such appreciation as you have oft made me imagine, I am here the creature of your love. If it be necessary for your welfare, here am I, ready to live for you in all lovingness, devoting the best energies of my nature to afford you the necessary facilities for fulfilling your glorious ministry, till you become what I would have you be—the pride, the ornament, and the benefactor of all humanity."

How this loving speech was received it mattereth not to tell; but doubt not the nobleness it breathed was as nobly regarded. Perchance there shall be found many, who would spy in the conduct of

Mistress D'Avenant something to take offence at, the which their own prejudices shall speedily distort into matter not to be tolerated; but such persons are of that close watching, magnifying sort, who, if they find a flea on a neighbour's jerkin, straightway hie them with a very microscopic malice, to shew the world what a monster they can make of it. Such methinks are entitled to no manner of consideration.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

She stirs! Here's life!
Return fair soul from darkness and lead mine
Out of this sensible hell. She's warm; she breathes!
Upon thy pale lips I will melt my heart,
To store them with fresh colour. Who's there!
Some cordial drink!
Her eye opes,
And Heaven in it seems to ope, that late was shut
To take me up to mercy.

WEBSTER.

Corbaccio. He must pronounce me his!
Mosca. 'Tis true.
Corbaccio. This plot did I think on before.
Mosca. I do believe it.

BEN JONSON.

Alas! Alas! where is my power!
Alas my wittes is in a were
Nowe bodye and soule bouth in feare,
And all goeth to the devill.

Play of Antichrist, CHESTER MSS.

THE page was alone, sitting in one of the unfrequented chambers of his lord's mansion, where he had of late been wont to retire for the sake of more perfect privacy in the indulgence of his own thoughts. He had for some time been in an exceeding comfortless state of mind. Doubts of the Lady Blanche's guilt had grown stronger in him at each succeeding interview, and his huge dislike of her had turned to an affectionate sympathy, as deep and true as ever rose out of unmerited suffering. That the earl was the dupe of some base villany, of which his wife and child were made the victims, he could not help believing; and yet the story of her shame looked to be so proved against her, that he knew not at times whether to regard her conduct as the evidence of a sincere repentance, or of a consciousness of perfect innocence. To him there appeared something so truly beautiful in her uncomplaining endurance, that, whatever she might have been, there could not be a doubt in his mind, she was of a most sweetly disposed nature; and this so won upon his own gentleness of character, he felt he would gladly lay down his life to prove her guiltless of the horrible offences laid to her change.

All this time the Lord Urban seemed to be fast sinking to the grave. He gave himself up more than ever to solitary rambles; and his fits of remorse became daily more terrible. The murder he had done appeared to be everlastingly in his thoughts; and the sufferings that came of it were of so moving a sort, the beholding of them must needs have softened the sternest heart in his favour. On one so affectionately inclined as was his youthful attendant, their effect may readily be conceived: Bertram did all that faithfulness and love could do, towards bringing of his lord into a proper comfort; but the iron had entered too deep to be withdrawn by such gentle surgery. Often and often, when he found his efforts fruitless, had he stolen into this unfrequented chamber, and there bemoaned his uselessness, and strove to hit on some plan which might restore peace to this noble family. Alack! there seemed not the slightest hope of such a thing. He liked not questioning of the servants; and Adam, who alone knew the facts of the case, as he believed—though he was communicative enough on every other matter, from affection for the youth, never spake on the subject.

At this time it was that the earl's kinsman before alluded to, arrived with his serving man at the mansion. He came late at night, and Bertram knew not of his visit till the morning. The unhappy De la Pole, as soon as he had intelligence of his kinsman's arrival, rushed out of the house in a desperate frenzy, as if he could in no manner endure the sight of a person, who, whether his intentions had been good or otherwise, had been so instrumental to his long-continued, unspeakable misery; and his youthful attendant, scarce less sad at heart, retired to the privacy before mentioned, to consider with himself how he could best get rid of so unwelcome a person. Whilst he was so engaged, he heard footsteps approach the door, and with them voices he recognised on the instant. In an agony of dread he rushed behind the arras; and there concealed himself, just before two persons entered the chamber.

"Here we are safe," observed one, as he closed the door after him; "we need fear no spies. Now, as I take it, the surest and profitablest thing, is to put him out of the way without any further delaying; what sayest? Shall we live like persons of worship, or starve like contemptible poor villains?"

"Nay, I am for no starving, an' it please you, master," replied the other; "I can have no sort of objections to such a course, seeing how many of the sort I have already had a hand in; but, methinks, I have hitherto been looked over somewhat. Here are you, advanced to honour chiefly by my good help, and likely to be put in possession of abundant great wealth and broad lands, by the same seasonable aid, whilst I am kept to no better state than a humble, poor slave; and, as far as I can see, in such paltry case I may ever chance to continue."

"By God's body, that shall never be!" exclaimed his master, with wonderful earnestness; "serve me in this matter, which shall be the last aid I will seek at thy hands, I will make thee a gentleman, and settle on thee in lands or money at least two hundred pounds a year."

"That contenteth me well enough," answered his associate; "I want only to live in some sort of peace and comfort, for I am getting to be tired of the life I have led: but let us heed our courses. My lord hath store of powerful friends, and get we suspected, it must needs come to a speedy hanging with us."

"Tut! where didst pick up so silly a thought?" cried the other; "I have good reason for knowing, his death would be infinitely acceptable to persons in authority; for since I have been at court, I have noted how much the Poles are hunted after, because of their nearness to the royal blood; and though my Lord Urban is but a distant branch, he is of the family, and that is sufficient to make his destruction exceeding desirable in high places."

"I would he had died of his own accord!" exclaimed his companion; "I'faith, I wonder he hath lived so long in such monstrous misery."

"Methinks we have waited for his dying long enough, of all conscience," said his master; "and as I am circumstanced at this present, his death is my only help."

"How desire you it shall be done?" asked the meaner villain.

"There is nought so easy," answered the other; "he is doubtless now wandering in the neighbouring wood; there, whilst he is wrapped in his miserable humour, we can steal on him unseen, and despatch him with our daggers, ere he hath opportunity for defence. This achieved, nothing is so easy as preventing all suspicion falling on ourselves, and making it appear it was done by thieves, or other lewd characters: then our fortunes are made, and we shall live pleasantly the rest of our days."

"Prythee, let us about it at once, then; for I care not how soon it be over," added his companion.

The page at first marvelled how such villains as he knew them to be, got into the house, and feared only for himself; but when he heard the vile deed they were plotting, his senses seemed utterly confounded with horror. His fear now was entirely for his lord, and he dreaded every moment the violence of his excitement would betray him, and so he be prevented from defeating the intended villany. At last, having sufficiently matured their plan, the murderers left the chamber, to proceed to its instant execution; and the page emerged from his hiding place, with infinite terror and intense anxiousness.

"Haste you, Adam, to the wood, or my lord will be foully murdered!" exclaimed he, distractedly, as he passed through the hall, wherein were several of the domestics; "to the wood! to the wood!" cried he; and stopping not to be questioned of the astonished serving men, he bent his steps as fleetly as he could towards the place he had named. Here he for some time continued running along every path where he had hope of falling in with the earl, in a state of such alarm for his lord, as exceedeth all conceiving. Every minute lost might secure to the murderers the success of their horrible plot; yet many such minutes passed in fruitless hurrying from one part of the wood to another. Almost hopeless, breathless and exhausted, on a sudden turn he caught sight of those of whom he had been in search. At a distance was the earl leaning abstractedly against a tree, as was his wont, his back being to the path, and his senses so entirely given up to his melancholy reflections, he could have no knowledge that, at the distance of a few yards, a man was creeping stealthily towards him armed with a dagger, closely followed by another, coming on with a like caution and a similar weapon; and these latter were too intent on their wicked object to note that, in a few seconds, they were being rapidly gained on by the quick light footsteps of their young pursuer.

Bertram in a very agony of fear he should be too late, seeing how near the murderers were getting to their intended victim—pressed on with a noiseless pace. The villain who followed his companion was almost within the youth's touch, but the latter was fearful that whilst he attacked him, the other might strike the fatal blow, and so render his assistance of no service. At a bound he presently passed the fellow before him.

"To your defence, my lord!" cried he as loudly as he could, and in the same moment he sent the foremost villain reeling to the earth with a blow of his dagger. The earl started from his reverie, gazed amazedly to find his kinsman standing a few paces from him with a drawn weapon—his kinsman's servant stretched on the ground, as though with a deep wound, and his page grasping a reeking dagger, facing his kinsman with looks of terrible determination. But the murderer waited not a moment of such facing, for directly he beheld his servant fall, and the youth's bloody weapon before him, he fled with such precipitancy into the thickest of the wood, that he was quickly lost sight of. Scarce had Bertram acquainted the Lord de la Pole of the meaning of what he had witnessed with such extreme astonishment, when old Adam came up in great haste and alarm, accompanied by divers of the serving-men well armed. No pursuit was made after the treacherous kinsman; and finding that the wounded man was not dead—though apparently no great way from it—he was carried to the mansion. Surely no one could be so happy as the page, in having saved his lord, and none so truly grateful as was the earl for such timely rescue at his hands; but with this service the former rested not satisfied. It seemed to Bertram something more might be done, and to the surprise of Adam, his companions, and their master, he went to the side of the couch whereon the wounded man was lying, and took him kindly by the hand. The dying villain opened his eyes; but as soon as he beheld the youth's features, he started in a strange amazement.

"Saul," said the page to him in an exceeding earnest and impressive manner. "You have long sought my destruction, and I never harmed you by word or thought. You have now fallen by my hand; but from no desire of vengeance for my own wrongs. As I hope for mercy hereafter I never wished you hurt, till to prevent my lord's murder, I was forced to lift my weapon against your life. I have before this knocked at your heart, and found you not so great a villain as you seemed. I would think well of you if I could. I beseech you forget not that your wound is mortal; and that but a brief interval remains to allow of your crowning your bad life with an honest repentance. I implore you to do it. I am confident you can effect a great good by a free confession of certain deeds, whereof there remaineth no doubt in my mind you had the principal handling. I allude to the Lady Blanche. I charge you as you look for your soul's comfort, reveal the whole truth."

At this the man fell to a pitiful lamentation of his monstrous wickedness, and very readily confessed that the countess was innocent of all that had been laid to her charge, and that his master, for certain designs of his own, had got one of the Lady Blanche's attendants to represent her mistress, after she was in bed and asleep,—and that he, Saul, was the cloaked person who had ascended the ladder of ropes, entered the chamber, and caressed the waiting woman, who was his leman, and that this woman was afterwards privily made away with to prevent her from declaring the part she had taken in the deception—which she seemed apt enough to do, believing it had caused the death of her mistress.

"God help me, I have murdered mine own child!" groaned the unhappy earl; and thereupon he fell into such a paroxysm of anguish as was fearful to look on.

"My lord! my lord! as I am a sinful man that child received no hurt," exclaimed Adam.

"Speak that again!" shouted his master, wildly catching the old man by the arm. "Repeat it—assure me of it, and I will bless thee to my life's end."

"An' it please you my lord, it is as I have said," replied Adam. "I liked not the deed, though I felt bound to do you whatever service you required of me. I took especial heed of the babe till morning, and soon as I thought 'twas fit time, I rode to a charitable lady's some miles off, and placed the new-born child so conspicuously, she could not fail seeing it on her going her morning's walk. I waited in concealment till she ventured out of her dwelling, as I knew she was wont to do; and I saw her take up the child and carry it within doors. I made you believe I had done as you desired, and having no doubt of my lady's guilt, I never thought it necessary to say the truth."

"But what name hath that place?" inquired his lord hurriedly, and with a wondrous eagerness. "To horse, my fellows! to horse! we must there on the instant."

"The place was called Charlcote, and lyeth convenient to Stratford on the Avon," replied the old man.

"Look to the page—by heaven he hath swooned!" exclaimed the earl, as he beheld his faithful attendant fall senseless to the ground.

"My lord!" murmured the dying man, as he raised himself a little on the couch. "Let me at least make some lasting happiness where I have produced such dreadful misery. That is no page. That is Mabel the foundling. To escape from the plots of Sir Piers Buzzard and myself, then set on by hopes of great reward, and striving all we could to get her into the power of my Lord of Leicester, who was enamoured of her, she at last disguised herself and got away from Charlcote, and hath hither fled. My lord, be assured of it, she is your daughter, and none other."

"Will my heart-strings crack!" exclaimed the bewildered happy parent, as he pressed the still senseless page within his arms, with such marvellous affection as none could see unmoved. "Help, I prythee, knaves—or my brain will turn at this sight. Open thy lids, my child, and behold that unnatural fierce father who doomed thee to death; and to whom thou since played so loving a part—my faithful servant—my brave preserver—my gentle-hearted true daughter! In mercy revive. Unworthy though I am, I do beseech thee afford me the exquisite comfort of thy full forgiveness. Ha! she stirs. My head swims with excess of joy. Oh, my dear sweet noble child, from what a hell of torment has this discovery relieved me!"

The feelings of the poor foundling so suddenly raised to greatness and honour passeth description. She whom no lowness of circumstance could render servile, and that the desperateness of danger turned from maiden gentleness to most fearless heroic valour, was not of a nature to meet such an event as hath just been described without her whole being experiencing its influence; but during all the time she poured out her heart's exquisite affections on the bosom of her father, there was one whom she was longing most ardently to join, whose love could alone make perfect the happiness she was enjoying; and waiting till the earl's transports became more calm, she whispered to him the words "my mother!" which in truth was all she could at that moment utter.

"How shall I appear before that most wronged of women?" replied he. "But justice commandeth it. We will to her on the instant." Then turning to the astonished domestics, and pointing to the funeral hangings that still covered the walls, he added, "Pluck down that mockery of woe. Your mistress, for whom you have so long mourned, is still alive. Follow me, and you shall have sight of her." Thereupon, holding of his daughter by the hand, he led the way to the library, followed by his wondering household; and throwing open the secret door in the old book-case, they proceeded through the passage into the adjoining chamber, where, to their equal marvel and delight, they beheld their long lost lady. Doubtless she was the most amazed of all to see her husband coming to her with so great company; but how much more was she astonished to behold him kneel at her feet, and declare how deeply he had wronged her; then proceed to state the cause of her sufferings, and the manner in which he had discovered her innocence; and, in the page whose gentleness had so won on her affections, gave her back the child she had ever since its birth believed had suffered a cruel death. Mother and daughter in a moment were so fondly clasped, and there was such a prodigal sweet show of smiles, of tears, of caresses, and the like exquisite affectionateness, as did all hearts good to look on.

"Blanche!" exclaimed the suppliant, "I know not what amends to make you for the unjust treatment you have had of me. As for myself, I have had such punishment of it already, nothing I might be sentenced to could come in any way nigh. Truly never was punishment so merited. For a phantom of mine own creating—that fantastic idol, reputation, I hurried myself into deeds that were far more completely its enemies than either the deed I suspected, or the knowledge of it I so sought to prevent. My guilt is none the less because things have turned out as they are. I might have been the murderer of mine own child—I have been a merciless tyrant to a faithful loving wife. Your humiliation I kept secret; but I would have my own a spectacle for the whole world. Thus publicly I crave your pardon. Banish me from your presence—do with me according to my desert; but to my last hour I will hold your name in my heart as the gentlest, lovingest, and truest wife that ever suffered of an unworthy husband."

"My lord!" replied the countess, as she raised him very fondly to her embrace, with tears in her eyes and deepest love in every look, "I beseech you no more of this. You have been the dupe of your false treacherous kinsman, who poisoned your ear with villanous wicked perjuries, for his own base ends. I have suffered scarce anything. I had always with me the conviction that your noble mind had been abused in some such manner; and that the day would come when my innocence would be proved to you: therefore I waited in patience till such happy time should arrive. Although my return to your affections I expected, never expected I sight of my dear child again: methinks the happiness of that should counterbalance all offences. My lord, I ever was your fond obedient wife; this nothing can change. And now, as there can be no hindrance to my leaving of this my prison,—seeing you have yourself made it known, and are satisfied of my perfect loyalty,—if it so please you I will live differently: but let me live as I may, if I exist not for the securing of your honour and happiness, be assured, in mine own opinion, I shall live exceeding ill."

Shortly after, this fair model of womanly patience and every other womanly virtue, departed out of that chamber, supported on one side by a daughter, in all respects worthy of such a mother; and on the other by a husband, saving some faults, worthy of such a wife—amid the honest boisterous joy of every member of the household. Mabel blessed the hour she thought of disguising herself in a left-off suit of young Lucy's, and friendless, penniless, and scarce able to proceed from long illness, trusted herself to the uncertain chance of fortune: but more fervently she blessed that exhaustion which led to her becoming an inmate with persons, who, after exciting her powerfulest sympathies for months, till she loved them more dearly than her life, proved to be those who, by nearness of blood and excellence of nature, were best entitled to hold such place in her affections. Here methinks 'tis but proper to add, that despite of her many anxieties and cares, she had oft thought, and with exceeding gratefulness, of that honourable and gallant young gentleman, Sir Valentine, who had loved her, and desired to make her his wife, when she was but a poor despised foundling. But we must now leave her to the care of her good parents, whilst taking to matter more necessary here to be handled.

Sir Piers Buzzard fled from the scene of his intended murder, cursing of his unlucky stars with all the fervour of a baffled villain, and scarce knowing where to go or what to be about. Truly he would have been glad enough now to have remained Master Buzzard, roystering with Sir Nathaniel the curate, Stripes the schoolmaster, and others of his boon companions he was wont to carouse with at Stratford before he set upon plotting against his kinsman's happiness, that it might cause him to die without issue, and so he profit by it—or even the life he led immediately afterwards when he gambled away his patrimony at the dice, and so being ready for any sort of service to retrieve his fortune, readily became an agent for my lord of Leicester, who never lacked such servants, or proper employment to set them upon. At last he seemed in so desperate a strait, he thought it might have been better had he swallowed the poison his noble master had prepared as a reward for his services of a like sort upon others, the earl's enemies; for he had become a disgraced man, his character was known, and he knew not where to look for even so much as a bare subsistence.

In a mood of extreme desperation he came to a narrow causeway that led close by the mouth of a pit,—once worked for coal, but now filled with water,—of a famous depth and vastness. He saw an old man approaching him, nearly bent double, as if by infirmity, and advancing slowly with the aid of his staff. When they came to within a few yards of each other, the old man looked up. In an instant such a change was apparent in him as surely had never before been witnessed. All trace of age or weakness in him vanished as if they had never been. He stood up firm and erect, with eyes flashing and a look as fierce as human aspect could express.

"Mine enemy!" muttered he at last between his teeth, as his staff fell from his hand, and his sword leaped from its scabbard.

"John a Combe, get thee hence quietly, or thou shalt dearly rue it!" said Sir Piers, drawing his weapon as quickly as he could.

"Hence, sayest!" shouted the usurer; "have I lived for this hour to go at thy bidding? Expect not so idle a thing. I have an account to settle with thee of long standing;—intolerable foul wrongs cry for revenge—years of hopeless misery demand recompense. The time hath come at last. Prepare! Hell yawns for thee, thou matchless damnable villain!"

At this he leaped towards the man who had done him such unspeakable injury, and commenced with him most desperate battle. Sir Piers knew his enemy's cunning of fence of old, and took to his defence with such caution as the fear of death generally gives. He had hoped that age had weakened the usurer's arm, or loss of practice had lessened his skill; but never was hope so vain. The old man, as he looked a moment since, plied his weapon with such briskness, the eye could not follow its rapid movement; and though his opponent was in the full vigour of manhood, and had of late years been in the constant practice of his weapon, John a Combe beat his defence aside as though he had been but a weak unskilful youth. There seemed a supernatural fury in his attack. He breathed hard through his clenched teeth; and gazed on his enemy so wild deadly a glance, it might of itself have appalled the stoutest heart.

Sir Piers, for all he strove his best, presently found himself wounded. At the sight of his trickling blood the usurer set up a scream of exultation that setteth all description at defiance, and fell on his opponent with a fiercer hostility than ever, ever and anon reminding him of the treacherous foul villany he had perpetrated against his peace. Thrust followed thrust, and all craft in parrying was of no help in avoiding blows so hotly put. One wound soon succeeded another, till the efforts of the knight for his own defence, from loss of blood and despair of heart, became more like those of a reeling drunkard than of aught else. Still the relentless weapon of his enemy pressed upon him, pierced his flesh, and drew such streams from his veins, that his path became slippery with his own gore. In the end his rapier fell from his relaxed grasp, and tottering with a faint supplication for mercy, he lost his footing, and fell with many wounds to the ground.

"Mercy!" shouted John a Combe. "By God's passion thou shalt have the same mercy thou didst shew to me."

"Spare my life! I beseech thee, kill me not! good John a Combe! worthy sir!—"

"Away with thee, thou abhorred and infamous villain!" cried the usurer; and despite of the other's struggles and abject pleadings, he took him in his grasp, as though he were a child, and with a giant's strength hurled him into the pit. There chanced to grow just below the brink of this fearful chasm, a bush, a branch of which in his descent the knight caught hold of, and there he hung clinging to it with so powerful a hold, as if the terribleness of his danger had given him new strength. Below him lay the unfathomable depths of the mine, clothed with a thousand horrors, and nought prevented his being dashed to pieces against its rugged sides, and then swallowed in its pitchy waters, save the twig by which he swung above them. In this fearful situation he made the abyss echo with his piercing screams as he clung convulsively to his hold. John a Combe stretched himself on the ground, with his head leaning over the pit's mouth, and fierce as he was against his enemy, gazed in horror at beholding the terrible spectacle that met his eyes. Sir Piers looked up with an aspect so marked with terror and agony, that it savoured more of a tortured demon than of a human being, his countenance was black and distorted frightfully, his eyes starting from their sockets—and he grasped the branch of the bush with such terrible force, that the blood oozed out of his finger nails. But the struggle, though horribly violent, was exceeding brief. It was manifest he was monstrous loath to die, or he would not so desperately have sought to prolong his existence.

Weak as he must have been from his recent wounds, and certain as was his destruction, he struggled and screamed to the last moment in a manner awful to see or hear. As if to add to the extremeness of his despair, he felt the bough by which he hung, giving way from the fierceness of his tugs. He saw it crack and peel—fibre after fibre snapt,—and the tough green substance of the branch was gradually breaking away. John a Combe, unable to bear so dreadful a scene, stretched out his arm with the hope of saving his enemy, but at that moment the branch was severed from the bush, and he beheld the screaming villain turning over and over as he fell into the yawning chasm, till a loud splash, followed by a deathlike silence, told him that all was at an end.

And in the manner related in this present chapter, perished Master Buzzard and his man Saul—a pair of those pests of society which occasionally are allowed to run their career of crime—to do their vile mischiefs unchecked—nay, in divers instances to obtain honour and profit by effecting the misery of the noble and the good; and then, when they fancy themselves to be most secure in their villany, are overtaken and overthrown, and by shameful and terrible ends, become monuments of avenging justice. And may all such manner of men meet such fit reward, till the world becometh to be purged of their baseness, and the everlasting heart of nature rejoice in the possession of a generous, loving, and honourable humanity.

John a Combe sheathed his own weapon, and flung that of his slain enemy into the pit; then kicking of his staff on one side as a thing no longer necessary, he went his way. Truly, there was little in him of the infirm old man now, for he walked as proud and erect as he had done in his best days. It seemed, that in the fulfilment of the vengeance he had so long and vainly sought, he had cast from him the load of suffering that had bowed him to the earth. The sense of intolerable wrong that had effected in him so fearful an alteration, appeared to have left him the instant his idea of justice had been accomplished, and with it had departed for ever every sign of the change it had produced. His miseries had died with the cause of them, and his truly benevolent nature, that no wrong or suffering, however monstrous, could affect to any great extent, now returned to all its natural, healthy, and generous influence.

It must not be imagined, that it is in any way unnatural for a gentle-hearted liberal-minded man as was Master Combe in his early manhood, to become so fierce and unrelenting as hath been shewn, for it hath ever been found that such ardent trusting dispositions do readily leap to violent extremes, at the sudden discovering of their happiness destroyed by such villanous means as were used by Master Buzzard. A rankling wound giveth sore pains, and wounds that come of over confidence in honourable appearances, and deepest truest love outraged and put to shame, rankle most, and are the longest healing. This breedeth and keepeth alive a sense of wrong, which feeds on hopes of a fitting vengeance, till long-suffering giveth it so great a strength as to make it the moving impulse of existence. Methinks it followeth as a natural consequence, that one so fiercely used should be no less fierce in his resentment.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Thus far, with rough, and all unable pen
  Our bending author hath pursued the story;
In little room confining mighty men,
  Mangling by starts the full course of their glory.
Small time, but in that small, most greatly lived,
  This *Star of England.*

SHAKSPEARE.

Why do you dwell so long in clouds,
  And smother your best graces.
'Tis time to cast away those shrouds,
  And clear your manly faces.

SHIRLEY.

Now all is done; bring home the bride again,
  Bring home the triumph of our victory;
Bring home with you the glory of her gain,
  With joyance bring her and with jollity.
Never had man more joyous day than this,
  Whom Heaven would heap with bliss.

SPENSER.

"I PRAY you tell me, Master Spenser, your honest opinion of this my play," said William Shakspeare to his friend, after, as it seemed, reading a manuscript he had before him, as they sat together in his lodging.

"Truly, I scarce know what to say of it, Master Shakspeare," replied the other, with a look of as sincere delight as ever was seen. "Nothing I have met with, either among ancient or modern writers, cometh at all nigh to it for truth, beauty, or sweetness. Despite the sad unhappy deaths of these exquisite young lovers, Romeo and Juliet will live as long as the language, out of which you have carved their imperishable story, shall endure."

"Indeed, I am infinitely pleased to hear you say so," observed his companion; "your acknowledged admirable taste and judgment making you the fittest person whose opinion should have greatest weight with me, and your excellent friendliness creating in me a confidence you would give me your advice, saw you anything amiss in it."

"Believe me, it hath such abundance of merit as to put all faultiness out of the case," answered Edmund Spenser; "I am enraptured beyond expression that I left Ireland at this time. I would not have missed the hearing of so choice a performance for a king's ransom. Oh, I would the noble Sir Philip Sydney were living at this time, what extreme pleasure he would have taken in its manifold rare beauties! But I will shortly find means of making you known to a gallant gentleman of my acquaintance, whom I take to be the only man in this world capable of filling the void left by my glorious departed friend."

"Be assured, I should be right glad of his countenance, if he is so worthy a person," observed the young player.

"He is no other than Sir Walter Raleigh," replied his celebrated brother poet. "As ripe a scholar as was Sir Philip, and no less perfect a gentleman. But how came you to hit on so truly charming a subject, and work it out with such inimitable delicacy? Have you writ more such plays?"

"I will tell you," answered William Shakspeare; "for some time past, I have taken to the altering of the plays of divers play-writers, who, finding any of their performances in which I had a hand went better with the public than those I had not meddled with, took care to employ me sufficiently. With some I wrote conjointly, and the plays of others I amended; but all that I gained by so doing, the affair having in every case been kept secret betwixt us—was the denial I had done them any such service, with no lack of slander behind my back. This put me on attempting something on mine own account; nevertheless, in consequence of the intrigues and enmity of my rivals, as I believe, though I have already produced more than one play of my own writing solely, I have not met that success which would be most to my liking. Certes, none of my performances have failed; nor have they been as yet in any notable admiration of the public."

"I would wager my life, that is the effect of sheer malice of those paltry play-writers," observed his companion, warmly.

"So I have been told," answered the other; "I have therefore been advised to act with some cautiousness. Meeting with the story of Romeo and Juliet, I saw its capability for the stage, and have written it as you see. This I mean to have read privately to the company, every one of whom, save the manager, I believe to be my true friends; and though old Burbage is churlish, I do not think him capable of caballing against me with my rivals. Afterwards, it shall be got up with a great secresy as to the author, and performed without their having suspicion of its relationship to one they manifestly mislike so hugely. I am apt to think, from what you have so handsomely expressed, it cannot fail of succeeding; and if I chance to meet such good fortune, methinks I shall have famous cause for laughing at the whole herd of play-writers from that time forth."

"Ay, that shall you, Master Shakspeare," said his gentle friend; "and, believe me, I am most earnest to aid you with what help I may, that they shall afford a sufficiency of sport. I will now take my leave of you for a brief space, having had such delectable conviction of your resources in expressing the beautiful and the true, that all my life long I shall have but one longing, which must needs be, that in after ages, the name of Edmund Spenser may be found in honourable companionship with that of his estimable rare brother in love, and associate in letters, William Shakspeare."

To this handsome speech, the young player replied in a like admirable manner, and these bright planets of their age separated in perfect mutual appreciation of each other's unrivalled genius. Nor could this be in any way extraordinary, for in many things were they marvellously alike. Each was possessed of that greatness of soul, which payeth ready homage to excellence wherever it may be found. The mind of either was embued with that lofty spirit, which emanates from the universal wisdom; and in their several hearts were those feelings of gentleness, of purity, of sweetness—of love, of truth, and sympathy for wrong, which can exist only in such as are selected by nature to be the chief priests of her immaculate temple. William Shakspeare had more studied the humours of men—Edmund Spenser had acquired greater acquaintance into the learning of books. The latter sought to purify mankind of unmanly impulses, by bringing before their eyes the noblest achievements of the most romantic chivalry; but the other was disposed to show the lights and shadows of the actual world—the virtues, merits, vices and follies that do commonly make for themselves homes, in every age and condition—and, embodying in their portraiture so palpable and imperishable a philosophy, that they shall afford most estimable teaching to all persons, unto the uttermost end of time.

I pass over the effect produced on his brother players, by the reading of that honey-sweet play; suffice it, that every one took to the studying of his part with such bountiful goodwill as he had never known before. Even the elder Burbage hoped great things of it; and, as some symptom his churlishness was giving way before an increasing knowledge of his young associate's manifold excellences of heart and mind, he insisted on drawing him out of his obscurity as a player, and pressed him to take the principal part in his new play. William Shakspeare gladly accepted this offer; for it was a character written after his own heart, and to a great extent the expression of his own feelings. The full strength of the company was employed in the performance; and every precaution taken to keep the authorship a secret.

The young player was in such excitement during the whole time it was in rehearsal, as he had never known on any other occasion. He knew that the life of hardships he had led for some years past, could only have an ending through the complete success of this, his recent and favourite production—he saw that there was no way to attain the greatness his ambition aimed at, save by giving to the world something of his which should be stamped by the seal of universal approval; and he felt that a failure was likely to give so rude a check to his proud aspirings, that it would go nigh to deprive him of that confidence in his own resources, without which no truly great work can be produced. In brief, he was well aware that his every hope depended on the manner in which his Romeo and Juliet should be received of the audience. He studied his part very carefully and not without the belief, an imperfect impersonation of the lover might mar the whole performance; but the praises he received at the rehearsals assured him, and, the more perfect he got, the more completely he abandoned himself to the true spirit of the character.

The day of the first representation of Romeo and Juliet arrived. In a state of monstrous anxiousness he was leaving his lodgings to proceed to the play-house, when, who should he meet but his old tried friend John a Combe. Not a sign had he of the miserable crabbed usurer; but in dress and manner looked to be as true a gentleman as might be met with any where. He had come expressly to look after the young player, believing he was not advancing his fortunes so rapidly as he desired. After most hearty greeting, the two bent their steps towards the Globe, at the Bankside, Master Combe relating all the news of Stratford, his own recent adventures, and the state in which he had left his companion's wife and children, parents and friends,—whereof the greater portion was exceeding comfortable to the hearer; and William Shakspeare in his turn acquainting the other with all he had been about of late, and the, to him, important experiment he was now on the eve of trying; whereupon John a Combe swore very lustily he would not take bit or sup till this same play he had seen, and so encouraged the young player with his prophecies and praises, that he arrived at the playhouse in as marvellous pleasant content as though success was certain.

When he entered upon the stage, a scene disclosed itself, which more than any other thing was like to fill him with a proper encouragement. As far as his experience went, the audience used to be chiefly composed of idlers of different classes, with occasionally some person of note and credit drawn to the place by curiosity. The playhouse was rarely full in any part; for the sports of the bear-garden seemed much more approved of those persons of chiefest fashion and influence, who are wont to draw crowds after them wherever they go—but now, when his eye fell upon the space where the groundlings stand, it met a complete den of faces, crammed to very suffocation. The rooms above were filled with so brilliant a company as he had never seen before, composed principally of the noblest ladies and gallants of the court—and up to the topmost scaffolds, every place was as full of spectators as close pressing could make it. This was in a great measure the result of the friendly exertions of the gentle Edmund Spenser, who so moved his friend Sir Walter Raleigh—then the Queen's special favourite—with the infinite merits of the new play, and the surpassing genius of its author, that he presently took in its success such interest as though it had been his own, and prevailed on all his acquaintance to accompany him to witness its representation. Where the Queen's favourite went there hurried, of course, the courtiers; and where the court came, all persons of fashion were sure to follow—and where fashion appeared, all who were desirous of some claim to respectability, were right eager to make themselves of the party. It followeth from these premises, that Romeo and Juliet was like to have as fair and full an audience as play-house ever held.

The young player could not help seeing, among the most prominent of the groundlings, Greene, Marlowe, Lodge and their companions, seemingly in a monstrous curiousness to see a play that none could name the author of. He saw these his envious rivals, of whose readiness to work him injury he had had sufficient experience; but his confidence gained by the sight of them. With such an audience before him, he felt that nothing was to be feared; and he entered into the playing of his part with a spirit which had never till then been seen upon the stage. It is scarce possible any could have been so fit to have personated the passionate lover, as he who drew him in such imperishable rosy colouring. William Shakspeare was possessed of all the graces of early manhood—an intellectual handsome countenance, that could take on itself the most eloquent enamoured expression with exceeding readiness, and a figure, which for manly symmetry of limb and graceful motion in exercise, was not to be excelled search where you would; added to which, his voice was so rich, mellow, and sweet, and he delivered the exquisite poetry of his sentences with such ravishing expression, that with music so delicate and new, no ear had hitherto held acquaintance.

The young player soon forgot audience, rivals, and all other present matters, in the intensity with which he entered into the feelings he was expected to feign. Now it seemed he had before him the gentle fair foundling, whose exquisite beauty had won the secret adoration of his boyhood—anon, the yeoman's blooming daughter appeared in the most seductive charms of loving womanhood, to rouse in him the uncontrollable passionate impulses of his youth,—and, lastly, the trusting, self-denying, noble-hearted Mistress D'Avenant, enriched with those sterling gifts of mind that afford a woman her truest title to divinity, seemed ready to pour out the treasures of her bountiful sweet affections, as if to call on him to meet her marvellous bounty by an immediate outpouring of every thought, feeling, hope, and sentiment, that existed in his nature, as the proper inheritance of manhood. With such deep moving stimuli, his exertions may in some measure be imagined. As for the effects they produced, it looked as if every spectator was spellbound. One would be seen in the pauses of the playing, gazing on another with such strange delight and marvelling as he could not find words to express. All the females, from the noblest to the humblest, were so stirred by the thrilling language and passionate manner of the young lover, that their very hearts were bound up in the story, and ere he had half played his part he had both young and old at his devotion. Such unanimous hearty plaudits had never before resounded in a playhouse; but proud as he felt at them he was not a whit less pleased at the honest prodigal pleasure of his old schoolfellows and brother players, with his worthy friend John a Combe, who every time he came off the stage, rivalled each other in their commendations, and sent him on again with fresh assurances and renewed happy spirits.

In brief, the whole performance was a triumph from the commencement; and so brilliant a one, perchance no player or play-writer had ever enjoyed. His envious rivals were forced into the expression of the general voice; doubtless much against their several wills, but as they believed his share in the popular approbation proceeded solely from his skill in playing, they beheld not it in any particular injury to themselves. As for the play, never were men put in so strange a state by one. They saw how vain must be any effort of theirs to mar its success, and kept perplexing of themselves with fears of the author's topping them in the public eye; and wondering more and more who he was. At the end the curtain fell amid such an uproar of shouts and plaudits, as is beyond conceiving. Every man seemed to triumph in the triumph of the play; and every woman regarded the author's success as the cause of true love and honourable devotedness.

William Shakspeare, thoroughly exhausted by his wondrous exertions, was receiving the earnest congratulations of his friends in a chamber of the playhouse, when the manager rushed towards him, and pulling him by the arm, implored him to come with him on the instant, before the curtain, for the audience were making of such a terrible din and racket he expected he should have the whole house pulled about his ears, if the young player did not speed to pacify them. At this the latter made what haste he could—for, in truth, he heard such a disturbance as was enough to frighten the boldest manager that lived. As he came nearer the stage he could, amid the universal uproar, plain enough distinguish his own name shouted by hundreds of voices. This was gratifying enough—but as soon as he made his appearance the plaudits and shoutings recommenced with tenfold fury. The ladies and gallants stood up in the rooms; the former waving of their fair white handkerchiefs, and the latter clapping of their hands and crying out all manner of praises. As for the groundlings and those in the scaffolds, such a storm of shouts and cries, and other boisterous noises, came from them as gave to no one the chance of a hearing. Some few appeared aware of who was the author, but by far the majority were as ignorant of it as the play-writers. The young player acknowledged the honour that was done him by the approval of the audience, with a graceful courtesy that lacked not a sufficiency of admirers; and so he waited to know their will, as he could not at first make out, among the confusion of sounds, what it was they were crying for. At last, one of famous strong lungs made himself heard above the rest by putting of the question, "Who wrote this play?" Whereupon the young player advanced nearer to the audience, which they taking as a sign he was about to tell them what they so much desired to know, there was a silence in a presently. His rivals listened with all their ears.

"An' it please you, I wrote this play," replied William Shakspeare. In an instant the storm burst out more furiously than ever. Hats and handkerchiefs were waved by every hand, and a chorus of cheers and praises broke forth from every throat. The chief nobles and gallants left their company and got upon the stage, thronging publicly around the young player, to give him their countenance and commendation; and his gentle friend, Edmund Spenser, who appeared to enjoy his success as though it had been his own, made known to him as many as were of his acquaintance. William Shakspeare felt that all his hardships and sufferings were more than recompensed by the proud triumph of that hour. As for his envious rivals, never men wore such blank visages as did they at hearing the young player acknowledge himself the author of that choice performance; and they slunk out of the playhouse as quickly as they could. It may here be necessary to say of them, that Greene died of great poverty, brought on by his own notorious ill living, after finishing his last, "Repentance"—wherein, with a sufficiency of canting lamentation of his own vileness, he stoutly abused his quondam friends, and secretly slandered his fortunate rival; that his associate, the infamous Cutting Ball—whose sister he kept as his leman—was hanged at Tyburn for his many crimes and wicked dishonest courses—a fate he richly merited; and his chief companion, Kit Marlowe in seeking to stab a dissolute associate with whom he had quarrelled at tables in a low tavern at Deptford, was miserably slain by him on the spot, with a stroke of a dagger thrust through his eye. Of the others, though they lived and produced plays, little is known to their credit either of them, or their productions.

But the success of William Shakspeare's admirable performance appeared to increase every day it was repeated; crowds came to see it, who went away so charmed that it presently became the talk both of the court and of the citizens. This can be in no way surprising when the monstrous difference is considered, that lies betwixt the graceful perfections of Romeo and Juliet, and the poor contemptible bombast of the Jeronimos, the Tamberlaine the Greats, and Orlando Furiosos, which had previously been favourites of the public. The appearance of a play in every way so amazingly superior, and so filled with the sweet graces of natural beauty, worked a prodigious change in favour of the playhouse. It shortly became the most popular as well as the most fashionable entertainment of the time; and the players from being looked upon as little better than vagabonds, were now resorted to by the best company in the land. The throngs which the performance of Romeo and Juliet brought to the Globe, completely obliterated the manager's prejudices against the author; and when, in consequence of the favour in which that production was viewed in high places, it was ordered that the company should be styled the Queen's Players, old Burbage, to shew his gratitude to one who had been of such important service, made him a shareholder in the property of the company. By this measure the young player found himself in the possession of a fair provision, and saw that nought was wanting but proper exertion on his part to lead him to fortune and greatness.

As soon as his circumstances allowed, he resolved on paying a visit to his native Stratford, fondly longing to see his dear children, and to make such arrangements for his parents, as would place them beyond the reach of those bitter necessities they had had such prolonged experience of; and taking John a Combe to be of his company, they started on their journey. The day before their departure from London, the latter in passing along one of the streets with his friend, was attracted by the appearance of a ragged filthy-looking woman, in a state of evident drunkenness, dragged along by a party of the city watch, who loaded her with such abuse, as if she had been the most notorious vile creature that lived, which, in honest truth, she went nigh to be. Master Combe suddenly left his companion, and went close up to her, regarding her with a searching scrutiny; but directly she cast eyes on him she screamed fearfully, and tried to hide her face with her hands.

"'Tis she!" exclaimed her former lover, and left her, with an aspect of mingled horror and disgust. This woman was the pretended Lady Arabella Comfit, the leman of Master Buzzard, who was so conspicuous an agent in the vile attempt upon the foundling; and having gone through all the grades of infamy, was now in the hands of justice, about to answer for a whole catalogue of her wicked base offences.

William Shakspeare travelled very differently at this time from the manner in which he made his journey to London, for he rode a good horse, as did also his companion, whom he amused famously on the road by recounting his adventures and mishaps in his former travels. The country now was in no way like what it was. The poor Queen of Scots had long ceased to be made an engine for harassing the people with vain alarms; and wherever the travellers went, the inhabitants seemed mad with the recent triumph of England over the Spanish Armada. Bonfires were lit in every town, and divers of the worthy country people, if they might have had their will, would have made logs of such "wretched villanous papists" as were nighest at hand. Little of note occurred on the journey. The young player passed but one night at Oxford; but doubtless that visit was infinitely to his contentation. They were nearing their destination, when they approached a cavalcade of horsemen, who seemed going the same road. Among them William Shakspeare quickly recognised his former venerable benevolent patron, Sir Marmaduke de Largesse, and putting spurs to his steed he was soon by his side.

Great was the gratification on both sides at this meeting; the old knight acquainting his young companion, that after arming his vassals, and marching at their head to help guard the coast during the threatened invasion, he had disbanded them, and having then proceeded to court to attend upon her Highness, he was returning home, first intending to call in his way on an old acquaintance and brother-in-arms, who was about giving a grand tournament.

"Truly I should be glad to see it," replied the other.

"Well, wend with me to my Lord de la Pole's, and you shall have as good a sight of it as any," said Sir Marmaduke; "besides which you shall behold his fair daughter, the Lady Mabel, whose history is so marvellous strange."

"De la Pole!—Mabel!" exclaimed William Shakspeare, in exceeding astonishment. "Surely that cannot be the exquisite sweet creature brought up as a foundling by dame Lucy."

"The same, Master Shakspeare, the same, o' my life! I know the whole story," answered the old knight.

"Never heard I anything so wondrous," said the young player. "As I live, Sir Marmaduke, that very Mabel travelled with me, disguised in male apparel, from close upon Stratford to the neighbourhood of the Lord Urban's mansion. Despite her garments, I recognised her ere I had been long in her company; but fancying she might feel some disquietude if she thought I knew who she was, I treated her for what she appeared to be. She gave me to understand she fled from some villanous intentions: and believing, when my Lord de la Pole benevolently took charge of her, taking her to be what she represented, that there was no likelihood of her being so safely disposed of elsewhere, I took my leave of her; but I have often thought of the gentle graceful creature since then, and this present moment am journeying to my lord's mansion to make inquiries concerning of her fortunes."

At this Sir Marmaduke marvelled greatly, and not without a famous admiration of the honourableness of his young friend's delicate behaviour to the distressed damsel. After some further talk on the subject, he spoke of his nephews: Sir Reginald had lately married; and Sir Valentine, after distinguishing himself very notably, had promised in a few months to visit his kinsman.

"He might have had the most covetable matches in the kingdom," added the old knight; "but he seemeth in no way inclined to marry. Methinks the death of his noble friend, Sir Philip Sydney, hath so grieved him, he cannot be got to care to love any other person."

"Doth he know of this change in the foundling's fortunes?" inquired the young player.

"Not a word," replied the knight; "for I received not advice of it myself till I was on the point of starting from London—he being then with the court at Greenwich; and from what I have learned—my intelligence coming from no other than the happy father—that though the earl hath sent, far and near, invitations to his entertainment, he doth not intend making any acquainted with the proper cause of it, till the whole company are assembled."

"I have had excellent evidence for knowing Sir Valentine loved the lady Mabel," observed William Shakspeare, "and I doubt not at all his refusals of marriage were created from his affection being engrossed by the humble beauty at Charlcote, whom he must long have lost sight of."

"I hope it may be the case with all my heart!" exclaimed his companion earnestly, "for doubt I not—to say nought of his own merit, which methinks should make its way anywhere—my old friendship with the earl will give no little help to my nephew's successful wooing of his daughter: and I should be right glad to see him happy, for he hath seemed in a very woful case for a long time past."

"Think you he will be at the tournament?" inquired the other.

"Surely, he cannot fail," replied Sir Marmaduke. "He taketh great delight in such things; and it is scarce possible he should not have intelligence of it. Nevertheless, if I find him not amongst the company, I will use all despatch in making him acquainted with whatsoever is most desirous he should know." Here the conversation was interrupted by the approach of Master Peregrine and Sir Johan, to whom John a Combe, in the meanwhile, had been relating his young friend's notable success.

"This cometh entirely of those proper studies we pursued together," gravely observed the chaplain, after a sufficiency of congratulation; "be assured, young sir, there is nought so like to lead to greatness as deep study of the classic writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans."

"Ancient pudding!" exclaimed the antiquary, in a monstrous indignation. "Dost claim my admirable rare scholar of me on such weak pretences? Hast forgot the many hours I have passed in Sir Marmaduke's library teaching of this my pupil? Ancient Greeks! Ancient figs' ends? I tell thee all his fame proceeded from my extreme painstaking he should be familiar with every one of those sweet repositories of delectable knowledge, the old ballads."

"Old fiddlesticks!" retorted Sir Johan, less inclined now than ever to lose the reputation of having instructed so worthy a scholar; and there was like to be again very desperate war between them on this point, had not the young player made such acknowledgments as went far towards the satisfying of both parties. For all which, to the day of their deaths, each considered Master Shakspeare's infinite genius came exclusively of his teaching.

Before the latter could get sight of the lady Mabel, she and her noble parents had been informed of his arrival by Sir Marmaduke, who took especial care aught he knew to his advantage should have a faithful intelligencer; and there could scarce be any persons who could so perfectly appreciate the conduct of his young friend as those to whom he spoke. The youthful student the poor foundling had beheld with such interest asleep under the tree, and who had rescued her so gallantly from the power of the licentious lord and his villanous assistants, and had moreover behaved so brotherly during her painful travelling after her escape from Charlcote, was sure to be received by the high-born lady, with sincere welcome and gratitude. Indeed, the earl and the countess did vie with her how they could best show their respect to one to whom they considered themselves so deeply indebted; but her particular delight seemed to be to have him with her on every occasion, to hear him discourse, which on all matters he could right eloquently, but if there was one subject she preferred to others, doubt not it was his former companion and excellent gallant friend, Sir Valentine.

In honest truth, her thoughts had been in that channel far more than ever, since the discovery of her parentage; and, with a woman's gratitude, she longed for nothing so much as for some opportunity to testify to the generous-hearted gentleman who would have taken her to wife, though she was of such humble poor condition, that she lacked not a proper estimation of his true affection. Whilst preparations were going on for the grand chivalrous entertainment which the earl had decided on giving for purposes of his own, a little plot was got up by him and others—of whom was William Shakspeare—to assist in carrying it on to the conclusion all desired. On the day appointed, the principal nobles and gallants in the land came thronging to the lists, and a crowd of curious spectators, from far and near, assembled in the great park, to see them engage. Proper buildings had been there erected; and in a commanding situation the countess and her daughter sat surrounded by the chief nobility of the country, to witness the proceedings. Among the knights present the Lady Mabel looked in vain for the one she most desired to see. She heard their titles, she beheld their cognizances, but all were strange to her; and she looked on with a careless eye, and took no sort of interest in the scene. Her attention was now almost entirely devoted to Master Shakspeare, whom she had made sit close behind her. All at once a great shouting arose from the crowd, which made her look again upon the contending knights, and then she beheld one whom she had not seen before, and whose title she had not heard. He had entered the barriers when she was most deeply engaged in conversing with the young player, having arrived late. He was clothed in a complete suit of black armour, with his vizor down. Noting that this knight overthrew all who opposed him, she asked who he was; thereupon Master Shakspeare gave her a very moving history of him, stating that he was called the black knight, and was an exceeding mysterious personage, of whom none knew any thing, whereof the consequence was no person was so much talked of. Among other things, he said he had heard his aspect was so marvellous ill-favoured that he rarely made it visible.

Nevertheless, of that press of chivalry none shewed such skill as the Black Knight—ill-favoured as he might be—and he was publicly declared to be the chiefest of all for knightly accomplishments. When the tourney was over, the Lady Mabel left her seat, exceedingly dull at heart her lover had not fulfilled her expectations by being one of the actors she had just witnessed. She was in one of the principal chambers in the mansion, in the midst of a most courtly company, in her attire rivalling the splendour of the noblest dame present, and in her beauty far surpassing the loveliest. The young player was beside her, seeming to be very intent on affording her some sort of amusement, by telling her strange tales of the black knight, in which it was difficult to say whether the horrible or the ludicrous most predominated. Whilst he kept her attention engaged, there approached towards them the very object of their conversation, with his vizor up, accompanied by the earl and Sir Marmaduke. He stopped suddenly as he caught sight of her, and gazed in rapt astonishment on her exquisite fair countenance and majestic figure.

"Sir Knight," said the earl, after he had allowed the other, as he thought, to marvel to an absolute sufficiency, "this is my daughter of whom I spoke. It grieveth me to the heart I cannot, after all I have said, get you to entertain the idea of becoming my son-in-law."

"Mabel!" rapturously exclaimed the Black Knight, and so audibly, the lady turned her gaze upon him in the instant. The voice stirred her deepest affections; and one glance sufficed to call them into fullest action. The knight was Sir Valentine, who had worn black armour since the death of his lamented and valiant friend Sir Philip Sydney. All traces of the earl's suffering had vanished, under the gladdening influence of those excellent ministers of good, whom he had treated with such monstrous injustice; and their happiness was now his sole care. He took care to make public the wrong he had done, that his story might be a lesson unto all such mere slaves of reputation, and their merit might be examples to every honest wife and affectionate daughter, as long as the world lasted. His efforts were crowned with a deserved success. The countess, who was hailed by her friends as one risen from the grave, was in such content as she had never till then had knowledge of; and her daughter, in the fond devotion of Sir Valentine, enjoyed such extreme happiness, as was the fittest recompense for her many painful troubles. Of the spectators, not one so much enjoyed the spectacle of her felicity, as he whose boyish dreams she had made so radiant with her early beauty. He had entered heart and soul into the little plot that had been designed for the purpose of bringing the lovers together; and witnessed the mutual delicious pleasure of their recognition, with a heart as pregnant with true enjoyment as had either.

Having promised every one of that now happy family, to their united earnest pressing, he would be present at the nuptials of Sir Valentine and the lady Mabel, he once more pursued his journey, accompanied by the same party with whom he had visited the earl's mansion. As he drew nigh the familiar places bordering on Stratford, every spot called up a thousand delightful associations. Far different were his feelings at approaching his native town, to what they had been when he last left it. Then, desperate unhappiness had banished him, friendless and obscure—but now, he returned full of pleasure in the present, and hope in the future, lacking neither store of friends, nor sufficiency of reputation; and having no sort of anxieties, save for those from whom he had been so long parted. Whilst his mind was filled with sweet loving thoughts of his dear children and parents, kindred and friends, he was accosted by a voice he could not fail of recognising in a moment.

"Said I not so, my lambkin?" exclaimed Nurse Cicely, seeming to be overjoyed at beholding her foster-child, returning to his native town in so gallant a fashion. She stood in the very same spot where he had last seen her, and he now remembered the fair hopes she had given him when he was in so despairing a humour. He gladly stopped and greeted the old affectionate creature in his kindest manner, and bid her be of good heart, for he would visit her anon, which put her in such garrulous contentation, she went off to her gossips, and would talk of nothing else. Every thing seemed just as he had left it, and his old acquaintances appeared in no way altered—save only Skinny Dickon, who had grown to be as stout a man as any in the town. As he rode by, there stood the Widow Pippins, leaning over the rail in her gallery, laughing with as notable a heartiness as ever, at no other than that still most miserable of constables, Oliver Dumps, upon whom it looked monstrous like as if she had been playing some of her jests. There sat the two merry wives, Mistress Dowlas and Mistress Malmsey, gossipping together at the latter's casement, whilst the worthy aldermen, their husbands, were standing at their several doors, shouting little matters of news across the street; there was Mother Flytrap and Dame Lambswool, Maud and her partner Humphrey, gaping with open mouths at the approaching cavalcade, till the latter recognising his old master's son, threw up his cap in the air, and shouted his congratulations in so hearty a manner, the whole town were soon made acquainted with their visitor. All this was exquisite to William Shakspeare; but when, on entering Henley Street, he beheld his honest old father in his homely jerkin, standing at the door looking to see what made that sudden outcry, his feelings became so powerful, he put spurs to his horse and rode up to the door as rapidly as he could; but the joyful cry to his dame of John Shakspeare as he beheld his son, brought out the fond mother in a marvellous haste, and the young player was scarce free of his saddle, when he found her loving arms around his neck. A few minutes after, his happiness was completed, by holding in his tender embraces first one and then the other of his dear children; and this he did in such a manner as seemed to show he knew not which of the three he ought to love the most.

"Ah!" exclaimed the youthful father in an empassioned burst of tenderness as he pressed them in his fond embrace—the others with delighted aspects noting his famous enjoyment, "Such sweet happiness never tasted I all my days! Who would not toil—who would not suffer—who would not school his affections unto virtuous honest purposes through the bitterest pangs humanity hath knowledge of, to crown his labour with pleasure of so sterling a sort? Truly, methinks such glad occasions prove, with the choicest of argument, all else but goodness is utter folly, and as absolute desperate ignorance as ever existed."

Here endeth the Story of

THE YOUTH OF SHAKSPEARE.

Note.—The courteous reader, with a very bounteous kindness, and it is to be hoped, not without a fair entertainment, hath thus far proceeded with the moving history of this truly glorious character; yet if he loveth the subject as it deserves he should, he ought, in no manner, to be content here to stop; but proceed with a proper diligence to the perusal of what is set down concerning of his after brilliant career, and likewise of those master spirits of the age by whom he got to be surrounded, which, with other matters of a like enticing sort, to wit, most stirring adventures—most delicate love-scenes—most choice humours and exquisite witty jests, he may count on having famous store of (else sundry notable critics err hugely) in the company of "Shakspeare and his Friends."